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EAGLE
AT MY
EYES

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BY NORMAN
KATKOV

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THIS BOOK
IS LESS MINE
THAN MARY'S

The eye that mocketh at his father,
and despiseth to obey his mother,
the ravens of the valley shall pick it out,
and the young eagles shall eat it.

Proverbs, 30:17

EAGLE
AT MY
EYES

My pa once said he almost killed me when I was five. We were fishing Forest Lake that Sunday, just the two of us, trying for crappies only. He was sprawled in the stern, a two-bit straw hat over his eyes, and in two hours he didn't take a fish from the water; and he didn't care.

We'd been on the lake at six, and now at eight o'clock we had two crappies, both mine. The sun wasn't too strong, the lake was still, the water glistening like a fresh-frozen rink. After a while he started talking, remembering the old days in Russia. I never had to prod him, and in all the years there was never any chronological order to the stories, but it was a rare time when he told one twice.

"What are you talking, kill?" I asked. "How do you mean, kill?"

He was sprawled on one side, lying on his hip. Now he pushed the hat back on his head. I waited while he lit a cigarette, inhaled, let the smoke trickle from his nostrils. He rubbed his nose and crossed his ankles.

"Kill," he nodded. "Honest and true, Joe, maybe a second more you be dead." He spit over the side. "Was a night that one." He nodded. "Damn me was a night I'm all right without more like him."

He remembered the bad times only on the good days. He would start always as abruptly as that, no hint what he would say. The geography never changed: Russia.

"Was Ma," he said. "Phil." My brother couldn't have been more than eight then. "Was Auntie Ruth, Sam Pascha, you remember, Joe, little man with mustache, he went back, that real fool." The old man spat for him. "Where he's now, who knows? That little bunch was with me. I have money for railroad, for boat, everything.

"Was then secret people, Joe, Jews all, helping to get out. Was a man, Petlura, Russian, a sonofabitch, same like the Nazis now, he wants no Jew alive. This one is a specialist: to smell Jews and to kill, his best pleasure. These secret people, some from Russia, some from America, maybe French too, plenty big Jews all over, they have the hiding places, houses mostly.

"Move only in nighttime, hide in daytime. Big thing is Rumania, then no more Petlura, no more Russia, no more them kind Nazis." He pushed the hat back over his forehead and talked to the water.

"Mostly, hiding places is a big house where one, two secret peoples paying plenty money to the man. Got to be Russian, or Petlura's murderers come to kill.

"See, Joe, is then the Bolsheviks running the country, good peoples all, but this Petlura is small killer. Like

good club fighter we watch in the Auditorium. This Petlura got horses, guns, and every night is a little small-town, *dorf*, killing and burning.

"This night was Thursday, by golly, I remember like yesterday." He turned until he was resting on his elbows, his rod forgotten, his ankles crossed. "Was middle December, cold, I bet thirty below. We're in the basement, maybe fifty people, little bunches like mine. Maybe twenty men, womens, children. This is a big basement, no cement, but plenty big, and only thing there is a stove, not burning, because was no coal or wood.

"We came there maybe four o'clock night before and lay all day. Phil is all right, and rest of childrens all right, but you have some kind of fever I don't know, like eczema, rash on your face. All day we lay there, womens together and men together. Can't smoke, can't talk, only whisper. Can't make no noise.

"Pretty soon is dark and time to move. Joe"—he sat up, bringing the palm of his hand down hard on his knee—"we six miles from Rumania, honest to God, I shouldn't see you graduate from university if I lie. Six miles.

"Well, I get ready to move. I don't know is six miles, youi understand me. I know just we got to move. I got the packs by me." He shook his head. "Some packs, kid, blankets, diapers, few shoes, pictures from my family, from Ma's. All worth two dollars.

"All of a sudden the Russian is there. Real sonofabitch man, people to him like dogs. Like *rats*. Petlura is riding to the town, we got to get out now. Get out is die for sure. Petlura got maybe two hundred, maybe three

hundred men. Find us on the road, he'll kill every one, maybe leave few women for him.

"We got to stay. *Got to stay*. This Russian comes down the steps hollering we got to go, right now, or he chase us out. But he makes mistake, Joe. You understand, for us, these poor fifty people, there is no place to go, Joe, except stay and keep quiet.

"Ah!" He rubbed his nose. "Was there a man, I don't know his name, maybe forty years old, big like Nagurski, maybe more. Red beard. Nice man with wife, no kids. He goes to talk with the Russian, whispering, you understand me, can't talk loud. He asks to stay. He begs. He says we give more money, he says things no man got right to expect from another man. Begs, Joe, begs. Russian says no. If he says no like a man is all right, but he says no like we cattle all.

"Three, four other men, they get around this Russian, he between but can't get out, and pretty soon nobody is whispering and nobody is talking and the big man he choked him.

"Choked him, Joe, dead like the fish." He kicked at the pail. "With his hands choked him. The womens was afraid, all right, but I tell you something, kid, you get used to 'fraid like you get used to good. They sit quiet, shhhhhh, not a sound.

"This big man take the Russian and pull him in a corner. We make a grave, I help too, remember there is no cement, just dirt, and we bury him there and cover him.

"Then we wait. An hour, two hours, three, we wait.

Then we hear horses and we know is Petlura. You think, kit, fifty people, and if he finds, everybody dead. Is such a terrible thing, laying like a dog"—he said it duck—"no gun, no nothing, laying to die.

"Didn't come to that house. We hear them in the town, yelling, most of them drunk, hollering. I find out later they killed two of secret peoples, cut them up like for feed.

"Maybe was midnight, pretty near, you start crying. Ma was holding you, Phil sleeping with Auntie Ruth, and you start crying. She try to stop you, couldn't, and I take you and wrap my coat around you and walk far in the corner of the basement, but you don't stop. I sing—soft, you understand—and kiss you and try to make you stop, but you crying.

"People are scared, maybe sonofabitches upstairs there hear you cry, we're all dead. Ma, poor womans, she is blue, so scared. Pretty soon that big man, with the beard, he comes with four other men. Give me the boy, he says. I look to him, don't understand, you see. Give me the boy, he says, while he holds out the hands for me, I should deliver. Then I figure what. This not a bad man, Joe, but he knows what's got to be. One kit for fifty people, don't balance. Scales crooked. I back up, they wait. Then he says again give me the boy and I know what he means. Honest to God, Joe, that minute I want to die.

"You don't understand, Joe. Can't understand. Your kit to you is more than you. He's hurt, you hurt harder. He bleeds, you bleeding more. He cry, you want to run away, not hear.

"Then the big man say to me if you don't want I should, you do instead.

"My own kit, I say—this is whisper, understand me. My own kit, what's the matter, you're crazy? My own kit?"

"I don't see no feeling in their faces. Then for a minute, maybe longer, I think I'll do it. I'm so tired, kit, forty days walking, no right foods, no baths, hiding like rats, I figure, all right, Joe maybe is better off. Maybe better I kill him." He looked up and across the boat at me. "I never tell Ma I think to kill you," he said.

"Then I know I can't. I can't, and if big man kills you, he kills me. Fifty people is fifty people, but wasn't his boy, was mine. I got small knife from the war—you remember I told you I took from dead officer. So I show the knife in other hand and I tell them, all right, you want kill, come kill.

"Me first, I say, start here. I'm here to kill, I say. Come on, kill.

"I say, come on, fools, kill. Remember, Joe, I see plenty dead people in Army. Dead is not new with me. I think these people want to kill you, I kill them all. I don't know what's happen, maybe just too tired.

"I say, all right, killers, come on. Murderers, I say, come on. I kill you every one, damn me, I kill you and I spit on you." He spat once more. "Believe me, Joe, I make no money if I lie to you.

"Big man is smart." He tapped his forehead with his forefinger. "Knows I mean. Knows if too much noise, Petlura is upstairs, outside there. He waits maybe another

minute. All right, he says, in the stove. Room enough there, stay till he stops cry. Hurry with kit, man, he says. I went with him, but the knife is there to recognize, if somebody forgets. Big man helps me in stove, and he kiss you, Joe, and push door so there is air for you and for me.

"I sit with you in ashes for maybe two hours. Then you sleeping and big man helps me out. Ma hold you all night and all day and thanks God, you quiet.

"Plenty times I think what if I kill Joe that night? I think, what if I give to big man, he kills you? Man wants to think bad things sometime, Joe, he's specialist in bad things. All men like that."

He reached out with his foot and kicked the sole of my shoe. "You a good kit, Joe," he said. "Damn me if I lie. You my boy, Joe, best boy man ever had."

He winked. "Not sorry I sit in the ashes that night. Damn me if I sorry."

I was seventeen then, a high-school graduate a month back and ready for the university in October.

Eight years later he followed me out of the house and stopped me at the car. I had my own then, an old Ford. It was almost dark, Ashland Avenue was quiet, and the sun was gathering up the last reluctant rays of light.

I could see his face in the half-light. He had never been that mad. He raised his arm high above his head, and I waited for him to bring it down on me, but suddenly he dropped it.

"Better I kill you that night," he said. "Better me, with my own hands, and you dead. Finished, damn me, and no

trouble from you. Hell with you, damn me, better you dead than Ma."

She had learned about Mary that day.

I remembered the story last night while Mary was under the shower. I thought of it again before I fell asleep, along with almost every word the old man had ever spoken. We hadn't talked about the bazaar at dinner, and afterwards we'd stacked the dishes and driven into the village to a movie.

I was in bed reading when she came out of the bathroom, her hair half wet and stringy, a towel around her shoulders and the red terry-cloth robe wrapped around her. I think if I ever let her, she'll henna her hair, wear red dresses, red gloves up to the shoulder, and maybe a gold bracelet to break the monotony. She had nothing on her face, her nose shiny and her skin so white against the robe she looked almost made up for a part.

"Want me to brush?" I asked.

"You're reading," Mary answered.

"Hell with reading. Come here to Poppa, champion hair brusher on White Bear Lake. In Ramsey County."

"Ho, Ramsey County."

"And Hennepin County."

"Joe."

"All right, baby." I pushed myself high up on the pillow. "Come on. I'm not the best brusher, but I'm the best *you* know."

She sat on the edge of my bed, back to me, then turned, bending to kiss me. "Hello, best brusher," she whispered.

"Hello, angel." How can a woman excite you after you've known her seven years?

I let my hand slip. She sat up. "Vulgar."

"Not with you, Mary," I said.

She reached around to squeeze my hand. "All right, darling, not with me."

There was no talk of the bazaar while I brushed. She looked through a home magazine. There was no talk after she was in her bed. We read and smoked for a while, and then when she reached out to press the night-lamp switch she looked over at me. "You'll come, Joe," she said. "You will, darling, this time?"

I got a smile together. "In the morning, angel. We'll talk in the morning."

"You will, though, Joe?"

"We'll see."

"It's been 'see' a long time, darling," she said.

"Baby, it's late," I said. I leaned over and kissed her forehead. "Good night, Mary."

I thought then I wouldn't sleep. For a time I lay in the dark trying to know if she was asleep, but there was no noise. We were well up in Bellaire, far from the main road, and most nights the area was still.

I tried to think of anything except the bazaar, and after a while it worked. I found a cigarette in the dark, lit it, and held the match longer than necessary, hoping to learn if she was sleeping. She was turned away from me, her arms around the pillow.

I don't remember how long after that I fell asleep. I guess nothing will keep you awake forever, and I thought of people who must sleep when somebody has died and that's the last I remember thinking.

I woke first, reaching over to the other bed and groping for Mary's hand, my eyes only half open. She was lying on her stomach, her face turned toward me, and I swear she smiled in her sleep. She held onto my forefinger and pushed her head into the pillow. The bazaar was with me, all right, but I tried to get it out of my head. It would be all right tonight. Twelve hours and over another hump. Maybe no more trouble for another year.

I kicked the sheet away from my feet. Some winter I was coming out here and burn these twin beds. We slept here four months out of the year, but even that was sacrilege away from her.

I closed the bedroom door behind me and the bath door. I didn't want my shower to wake her and I hoped, I suppose, that she would sleep into the afternoon. I hoped she'd wake ill and I asked forgiveness for the thinking, but wanted it nevertheless. I hoped I'd see rain, but looking outside, there didn't seem to be a cloud in Minnesota.

I found my skivvy shirt and blue jeans. Those and

huarachos were regulation out here. I got the *News* off the back stoop. I squeezed oranges, I got water boiling. I found bacon and I had the drainboard completely fouled up with dishes and orange rinds and glasses when I heard the shower. The coffee wasn't the best ever made, but it was black and hot. I even had the board in the nook set before she put her head in the doorway. When I kissed her, I didn't want to let her go.

"Baby, I don't want to let you go," I said.

She pulled my head down. "Don't, Joey," she said. "Please never." She kissed my ear and then bit gently and broke away.

I settled with the paper after she'd chased me from the stove. I turned to see how the Saints had done last night. I could read nothing of the baseball team, the bazaar seemed to be all over the page. Now was when she'd start all right. I tried to think maybe she wouldn't go this time, but I was scared and plenty.

You see, there was nothing to do but sit and wait. Any talk *had* to lead straight for the bazaar. I couldn't say let's go fishing, or drive over to Brock's and get two horses, or go swimming, or on a picnic. I had to wait and let her make the break.

We went through breakfast silently, each of us with a section of the *News*. Always when I was on vacation I could read the paper casually, just skipping through it, forgetting that my by-line belonged on the front, on the local news page or on page three. I was a newspaperman, sure, but not for these fourteen days a year.

She fumbled for cigarettes, her eyes on the paper. I

put her fingers over the pack and then reached out to give her a light. She smiled briefly at me, went back to her paper, tapping the cigarette constantly against the rim of her coffee saucer. I couldn't read and I couldn't smoke. The bacon was heavy on my chest. Finally she set the paper aside, looked across at me smiling: I knew her well enough to see she was determined it would go off all right.

"Isn't it a beautiful day for the bazaar, Joe?"

I smiled back. "Couldn't be better, angel."

"Remember last year when it was windy and nobody drove out from town?" Neither had I. I was over in Wisconsin on a farm murder.

"Sure," I said.

She pouted. "You don't, Joe. You were in Wisconsin."

I found her hand. "I was with you, angel. I'm always with you." She squeezed my fingers.

"Joe." I could always get her with something like that, and remember this: it wasn't pretty talk, it was truth all of it and always. She was suddenly excited. "It's going to be *so* much fun today. Oh, Joe, you'll have *such* a good time. You'll dance with me, won't you?" She leaned over the table. "You will. You know you're the best dancer in the world, and you spoiled me for dancing with anyone else, but you're an oldie, won't ever dance any more."

I laughed with her.

"And everybody will be jealous of me. They'll say, look what Mary's got. That's what they'll say." She nodded twice. "They'll say Mary certainly has a handsome husband. They'll say, no wonder she's been hiding him. They'll say, she's lucky, that girl."

I caught her nose and pinched. "Let's get the dishes, angel." I got out of the nook and stood over her, running my hand over her hair. "Come on, angel, help me."

She looked up under my hand, sober now. "Joe, I'm going over to the Club after the dishes and I want you to come with me."

She saw it on my face then and maybe she finally believed I'd never get on the other side of the lake. The brightness and the happiness went out of the room as slowly as they pull the sheet over a stiff and as surely. "Why so early?" I asked.

She spoke too quietly. "They want us for the decorating, Joe. The bazaar starts at two and they want us to help."

She was still sitting, looking up at me. "You made a mistake," I said. "It's not us, it's you."

"Joe, please."

"Mary, you go over and I'll get there later." I got two handfuls of dishes and took them to the sink. When I turned she was standing against the wall, her arms crossed and rubbing her elbows, a spot of sun on the floor at her feet. "Joe, I'm not going through another bazaar without you," she said.

"Swell." I had the table cleared. "We'll have a better time alone."

"Joe!"

"Baby, why do we have to go through this routine every year? I'm not going where I'm not wanted. You think it's your duty or you're beholden, then go ahead." All the anger and the distrust and suspicion I felt against all of them I could at times feel against her. She was their

representative at these round tables, wasn't she? She took the affirmative, didn't she? She held the right, oh yes, she was always the right.

"Joe." She could do it: stand there, quietly suffering.

"Baby, please." I quieted down a little. "Please, not this year. Not today. I'll wait up for you. I want to fix the dock anyhow."

She came over and held my skivvy shirt with her fingertips. "Joe, you *have* to come tonight. I've told people you'd be there." She let me go and walked to the sink, picked up a dishcloth and turned to me, her back to the faucets. Holy smokes, she was near crying. "I can't get by any more with telling them excuses." She'd even picked up my idiom, cripes, we talked alike now.

"Why today, all of a sudden?"

"Joe, come with me, please."

"Mary, for God's sake!"

She had the dishcloth crumpled. "Joe, you've got to come with me!"

"Mary, I'm never going across the lake to the Club and that's the end of it."

She let the cloth drop. I watched her bend to pick it up. She dropped it again on the drainboard, then rubbed her elbows once more, and as long as I live I'll never forget how she looked: her skin as white as the night we drove to get married, her lips working, her bare legs pushed out before her, her hair piled on top of her head, her scarf out of place somehow in the morning sun.

"Joe," she said. "Joe, if you don't come it's the end of us."

"What's the matter with you?" She'd never said that since the night we started for Iowa and the justice of the peace. I took two steps and held her shoulders. "What's the matter with you? What are you talking about, the end of us?" Her arms reached out for me and her head dropped to my chest. I picked her up and carried her into the big room and sat her on the leather couch. I kneeled on the floor before her and she took my face in her hands. "Don't you see, darling," she said, "these are my friends. It's been long enough, Joe, I can't make apologies any more."

"Apologies for what?" What sense did what I said make?

"Joe," she pleaded. "Come once and if they don't ask you to join in a week, I'll resign."

I got up and walked to a chair. I could feel my heart and the pulse in my wrist and the pulse in my throat. "I'm not going. No, Mary."

She rose and stood looking at me. Have you ever seen a man standing waiting for a verdict? Have you been in a hospital and watched people's faces when the doctor tells them it's no use? Have you been witness to complete failure, futility, hopelessness? My wife's face was that way.

"All right, Joe," she said. She walked back to the bedroom while I sat thus, my legs crossed, waiting for her to come back.

I couldn't even hear her in there. She was gone for ten years and then finally she came out. She'd changed

to a dirndl and moccasins, no stockings. She had a red ribbon in her hair and she looked as old as a high-school cheerleader. I saw the small bag in her hand. "What's that?" I asked.

"My swimming things," she said.

"You could come back to change," I complained.

She was almost to the front door when she turned.

"Honey"—her voice was kind—"I won't be back."

"Mary!"

She shook her head. "You've got to come, darling."

"Mary!"

"You have to, Joey. I can't do it any more."

"MARY!" I watched her open the door and go out, close it. I heard her going down the steps and then I heard the gate swing. I waited, not getting up, for the car to sound and then hoped it wouldn't, that she'd turn and come back.

The car started and I sat there waiting and she didn't come back.

So it would be another bad day. Ten-thirty now and maybe four hours before she got back. Maybe six; maybe not until late tonight.

I don't know about other people, I've only been married once, but with me I was licked if we parted with an argument between us. No different if I went to the drug-store or the market or the Y—I was half a man, maybe none, until things were all right once more. It could be on the telephone or touching her, she could be sorry or me, but until we were right I was never any good.

I didn't want to swim and I didn't want to fish or read.

Hell with it, I'd sit here until she came home. I lit a cigarette, and as I blew at the match I saw the wedding band on my finger.

We bought them a month after we were married.

I hadn't seen her for a month when she called me that night three years back. It was Friday, my aunt Ruth had come to dinner, and Ma had the linen on the dining-room table.

Except for the High Holidays, neither the old man nor my ma went to the synagogue. It wasn't that kind of a house. They talked Yiddish, sure, and there was always fish and chicken on Friday night, she still lit candles, but that was all.

I had a shot of whisky with the old man and Phil before dinner. Helen, his wife, had brought a bottle of wine. We got through that with the food and were sitting around listening to the old man when the phone rang.

It had been four weeks, remember, and except for going to work, seeing movies, and taking my ma for a ride in the evening I hadn't done anything. No women; that never did help. No drink; I just got sick. No nothing.

Quits was quits, and I saw nothing for me but a life with my folks until they went.

Ma was in the kitchen. I remember her answering the phone. She came out through the dining room and stopped in the arch, her hands in the apron. "A girl," she said flatly. "For Joe."

The noise went out of the room as though it were a tomb being sealed. I was sitting just to her left in the big chair, my feet on a footstool, and I remember setting them on the floor, then looking around the room. The old man was watching me and Helen was watching me. Phil got off the couch and stalked to the windows. Aunt Ruth looked at Ma.

"The office," I said and got out of the chair. I *had* to look at Ma as I rose. "Probably the office," I said.

"Her, Joe," she said. "It's her."

"Ma, for God's sake."

She looked at the old man. "Henry, it's her! I recognize her, why isn't she burned by fire! I know her, came to take my years! I know her, why doesn't she drown there, with her family, all of them drown!"

I looked at the old man. He sat quiet, his feet on the coffee table. "Ethel," he said. "You too excited."

"Her," Ma answered. "Won't leave him alone. Her, makes him crazy." You see, it was all Mary's fault.

I put my arm around Ma and walked to the couch. "Here, sit down and take it easy. Just take it easy. Probably the office." As I turned, winking at Aunt Ruth, Ma jumped up.

"Office! Come, I'll listen to the office." She took my hand. "The office I can hear too."

Not Mary. I knew that. Enough was enough and she'd never call. Not again. I followed Ma through the dining room, thinking it could be the office or Bill Bird's wife, or a telegram, or the Jewish Center asking for something, pictures or a story. It could be anybody, cripes, there must be one hundred thousand women in St. Paul.

I prayed it was Mary.

Ma had the refrigerator door open, her back to me, but she didn't move, didn't lift anything, didn't make a sound.

"Hello," I said. Mary, be there. "Hello."

"Joe." Would I ever, as long as I lived, forget her voice? "Joe, is that you?"

"Yeah. Kay?" That was Bill Bird's wife's name.

"You can't talk?"

"I'm fine, Kay. How are the kids?" I said.

"Joe, I want to see you. Right away, Joe."

"No, Kay. Nothing but sitting around with the folks." I hadn't heard the refrigerator close.

"Can you pick me up at Summit and Snelling in ten minutes, Joe?" Yes, darling, I can pick you up. Sure, angel, bless your heart and keep you and love you. Hello, baby. Hello, sweetheart. Hello, sugar.

"Fine, Kay. Right." I hung up and was talking to Ma before I turned. "Kay Bird's having some people over. I'm going to drive out there."

I saw she believed me when she turned from the refrigerator. "You'll have to dress," she said.

"Naw. I'm all right. I'll wear a sweater and a sport shirt."

"You can't go to people with a sweater and a sport shirt." Remember, I was twenty-eight years old then.

"Forget it, Ma." I walked into my bedroom with her following. "The sport shirt is all right."

"That's not the way to go to people's houses."

I turned to her. These small victories were all I had, but I relished them. "Maybe not, but that's the way I'm going. Do you want to watch me dress." She looked at me with such bitterness that I lost the victory. She had been stabbed now, double-crossed; see, I didn't mind her. I was just no good because I didn't wear a jacket.

One thing I remember well: getting some money out of my desk. I always had around fifty bucks there and I can't tell you yet why I took all of it. Ma was out in the living room with the folks when I came out.

"Take a raincoat," she ordered. "Might rain."

"I don't want a raincoat!"

"Take the raincoat," Phil shouted. "What the hell's the matter with you? Do you have to say no to everything she says?"

I didn't answer him. I found a raincoat in the closet and put it over my arm. "I'll be home early," I promised.

The old man followed me out on the stoop. "Take my car," he offered.

"Naw. I'm all right."

He put his hand on my shoulder. "Don't have to be mad on the old man, kid."

"I'm not mad." It had begun to cool down some.

"Take the car. Maybe you find there a girl, some kind you like. Take a ride."

"I've got a car." A six-year-old Ford sedan.

"All right, Joe." He turned to me, smiling, shaking his head. "You don't see her, Joe." No question; he was telling me.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Just say, Joe. Say."

"Hell, what's the matter with you?"

"Say, kit," he said.

"No. I—don't—see—her. Is that enough?"

"Don't be mad," he said. Then he goosed me. "For Christmas," he said, shoving me gently. "Joe, have few drinks there. Won't hurt," he said.

It's maybe a mile from my house to Summit and Snelling. I didn't drive fast. I didn't have to now; she would be there. That month fell away from me as I turned on Summit. I don't know how to tell you what being away from her was like. Don't know how to explain it. I didn't want anything away from her; the job, my family, friends, clothes, dentist, barber, what little publicity I did on the side, none of it left a taste on my tongue. I could go to work, sure, and do my job. But it meant nothing to me.

I got through days when it was something just to breathe normally. I let myself be led, submitted to any invitation because I didn't care, and there was never a minute, never a second when she wasn't with me completely, in my head and in front of my eyes and wherever I turned.

Don't tell me it's trite, everybody gets stuck; that you've

heard a thousand stories and the theme is the same. Everybody dies too, but people are sad for them; and everybody gets sick too, and people send condolences, don't they?

I'd been ashamed of being in love for four years.

The semaphore held me on Lexington Avenue and I sat wondering where we would go. She had quit this time, you see, not me. She said enough and she had to call. If I did, she would have hung up on me. So that was over.

She was on the corner. I saw her a half block off, wearing a peasant skirt and anklets and the moccasins she loved. She was sitting on the low retaining wall, her legs swinging, hands pressed down on cement. When I stopped, she was almost to the car, walking across the boulevard grass toward me.

Do you know how many reconciliations we'd had? Maybe one a month for the last two years. Always when I saw her again, I kind of inspected her to see if she'd changed any, if by some strange physiological process her features had altered, her face thinned, her arms shortened. Always it was Mary, with the same hair-do, and same walk and same smile, and same nail polish.

She slid into the car, lifted on the door handle, and slammed hard the way you had to if you wanted it closed.

"I didn't bother you, Joe?" Her face was anxious.

I shifted gears. "How can you bother me, Mary?"

"Had to see you," she said.

"I had to see you, baby."

She was silent for a time, sitting with her leg under her, back to the door as she always did. I drove down Summit

toward the river, waiting for her to talk. I didn't care if she was silent the rest of the evening.

You see, being with her, the tension and the worry, the trembling and the tied-up stomach just left me as surely as heat leaves the athlete's body under the shower, it was almost that physical.

She reached for the cigarettes between us, knowing they'd be there, and lit two and gave me one. I passed Cretin Avenue and wondered if I should turn at the dead end a block off toward Fort Snelling or toward the university. "Joe," she said, "stop here."

"Huh?"

"Park here, dear. I want to talk to you." There is a tiny park at the end of Summit with a half-moon drive for cars. It was almost full when I pulled the emergency brake.

I turned so that I faced her, smiling at her, waiting. It was good to be home again.

"Joe, you know I wouldn't call unless it was important." She was talking to her hands, folded in her lap.

"All right, baby." I put my hand over hers.

She drew her hands to her. "Joe, please."

"I didn't mean anything, Mary."

"Don't be angry, dear. I want to talk."

"You talk," I said soothingly. "Talk all night and I'll listen." Cripes, I was happy being with her. "Just talk yourself through, but don't run out of nickels. You talk, baby."

"Joe, I don't know how to tell you."

"Forget it," I said.

"I don't know how to start."

"What's the difference?" I bent my head close. "It's all right now."

She shook her head, still looking at her hands. "No, Joe, I've got to tell you."

Maybe the best thing was to sit quiet and let her talk. What difference, we were together, it was all right, she was in the car and this was my girl.

She looked up at me and I could see her eyes pleading for help. "Joe. Joe, oh, Joe."

I waited.

"Joe, I'm going to get married."

No. No. Cripes, no. No, that wasn't so. That couldn't be.

"Joe, I am."

"You're what?"

"Get married." She said it as though she were admitting a crime.

"Who to?"

"You don't know him, Joe."

"Hell, I don't. I know everybody you've ever gone out with. Who is he? Cripes, you can tell me the winner's name, can't you? Who is the sonofabitch?" I rolled my window up. "Does he know you love me? What the hell are you marrying him for? What kind of a goddam fool business is that?"

"Joe, please."

"Don't please me. Marry. Are you crazy now? What's the matter with you, are you crazy? Can't you wait a while, for cripes' sake? Married right off. Give the body a

chance to get cold. What kind of a crazy deal is that? Mary, goddamit, what's the matter with you?"

"Joe." She was twisting her fingers.

"Baby, please." I reached out for her but she drew away. "You can't marry anybody like that. You don't love anybody. Mary, you don't do things like that."

She nodded again, then looked up at me. "I'm going to, Joe. I told him."

"Told who?"

"Eric Morgan. He's from Fargo. He's very nice. He met me, I mean, we met at the Club. I couldn't stay home, you know. Couldn't sit home all day and all night and listen to Mother curse you. He's nice, he loves me, he said so, and he wants to marry me, and I told him yes."

"Told him yes? What do you want to do, ruin yourself good? What's the matter with you, Mary, are you crazy?" I lowered my voice, inched over on the seat. I put my arm over the seat and bent to her.

She covered her face with her hands. "Joe, no," she said. I moved back. "Joe, no, don't kiss me. Don't kiss me." She was looking at me now, straight at me. "Leave me, Joe, please. Don't kiss me."

She rubbed her cheeks with her hands. "Don't want you to kiss me. Kissed me enough. Kissed me four years." Her lip trembled. "Kiss me all the time and I can't kiss anybody else. Can't kiss anybody unless I keep my eyes open and think it's Joe. Isn't Joe. Don't kiss me, then tell me we can't go on together and send me home and cry. Can't cry any more, Joe." She wept softly, her head down. I put my arms around her, trying to draw her to me, but

she wouldn't let me. I held her thus while she cried and then suddenly she sat erect, crying a little still. I gave her my handkerchief.

She blew her nose and held the handkerchief there for a minute. Then, almost slipping it into her pocket as she always had, she handed it to me. "I'm going to get married, Joe."

I shook my head, smiling at her. "No, baby."

"Oh yes. Oh yes. In two weeks. My family and his family, and in a church and with people and my father taking me down the aisle. I'm going to wear my mother's dress and have bridesmaids and there'll be ushers. I'm going to have a wedding, damn you. I'm going to have a big church wedding and not talk about sneaking away. I'm going to be happy at my wedding and get presents and teas and silver and there'll be a minister and presents.

"I'm going to get married and have a baby right away and go to Fargo, damn you, and you won't be there."

Then she had hold of herself completely. "Joe, I've got to. I've got to, don't you see, I have to get away from you. I can't take another beating, letting you build me up and then letting me fall and never any end. I can't, Joe."

I knew she spoke true then. This had never come up before. Gone out with other men, sure. But marry, no.

As long as she was in town, even though I didn't see her, it was all right. As long as she was here, okay. Marry somebody else, no. Go to bed with another man, no, I couldn't stand it. I took her hands in mine, kissed the palms, then each finger, then the palms again. When I

looked at her, the love there in her face was all for me. I shook my head. "You can't."

"Joe?" It was the last time she would ask and I knew it.

"Come on," I said. "Come on, we'll get married."

She put her head on my chest. "You don't mean it," she whispered. "You're just saying it because you don't want me to marry Eric and you'll kiss me and talk me into something. Joe, you don't mean it."

I stroked her hair, looked out over her head to the Minneapolis bank across the river. I had to mean it, because I *had* to marry her. "Baby, come on. We'll drive tonight. Will you drive tonight, Mary?"

So now, at this moment, all the misery and near-tragedy, every grisly night we'd had together, all the shouting and screaming at home, the tears, the trembling, the sleepless nights, and the promises never said to be kept came right down to this night and this minute.

"You'll turn around at Mankato, darling. You turned around last time. Oh, Joe, you won't. You won't, darling, and I'll know you tried."

"I will, Mary." I had to. Holy Jesus Christ, this time I had to.

She smiled at me, as a judge smiles at a habitual offender. "You're talking, Joe. Darling, you've always talked."

"No, Mary." You see, even now I wanted to stall, wait.

She picked my hand off the seat, kissed it, bit a knuckle as she always did. "Take me home, darling."

I turned away, got the Ford started, and waited until we were rolling away from town, toward Fort Snelling.

I spoke to the windshield. "Mary, I'm scared but we will. I don't know what my family will do, but come on. We'll go to Iowa and I won't turn around and we will. We'll get by, angel, just help me. Come on, Mary, we'll go." Couldn't stop talking. "Come on, Mary, we'll get married and figure afterward and be all right. We'll be all right, you just stick with me. Don't go away and we'll be all right." I turned to her and she was nodding while I spoke. "Come here, baby," I said, "and hold my arm."

We were married in Fall River, Iowa, the next morning at ten o'clock. We picked a bungalow, one of those prim little places with manicured lawns and fresh paint that look as unreal as cake decorations.

The man's wife came out of the kitchen wiping her hands on an apron, and all through the ceremony she stood about ten feet from us, lifting her nose to her stove, turning from her husband to the kitchen door and then back again. The other witness was their daughter, a short, fat little girl in blue jeans and saddle shoes, holding a swim suit and a towel, sun oil and dark glasses in her hands, worrying that the gang would get there before we were through.

When he finished, I turned to Mary, holding her hand and the dime-store ring we'd bought, looking down at her and filled with such fear, such foreboding, that I needed all my will to keep from running through the front door.

I gave him five dollars. The girl broke for the front door and his wife moved to the kitchen. She didn't even offer us coffee. He shook hands with both of us. It seemed too early for his marrying smile.

Outside on the walk I took Mary's arm. She was trembling, I could feel her shaking, and I put my arm around her, holding her close.

Then I saw the old man in my head, and my mother beside him; Phil, Helen, Aunt Ruth. They all crowded in: my uncles, my aunts, my cousins, every Jew I had ever known, had ever said hello to, they were all there, some shaking their heads, some shouting at me, some crying, some angry, indignant, sorrowful, pitying, scorning.

I wished I was dead.

The Ford's door hung awry on worn hinges, like the life I saw ahead of me. I hated myself and I hated this woman who had tricked me into this, begged and pleaded, lied and wept and trapped me.

There was a bright sun in the sky, warm and sticky, and the main street of the town, two blocks off, was already busy with the Saturday trade.

She didn't cry until we were in the car. I was behind the wheel lighting two cigarettes, trying to keep my guts up, and as I turned to give her one I saw she was crying, sitting with her hands between her knees, her head down, her feet tight together. I saw a streak of grease on her leg and her anklets were dirt-smudged. Over her head I could see the justice pushing a lawn mower out of the garage. I could feel him swearing once more that this was never going to happen to his kid, nobody was going to get her in trouble, be sure of that.

I started the car and drove away from the house, back toward the highway. Do you know how hot Iowa can get in July? We had had coffee and a roll for breakfast,

and there in the early morning sun the cheerfulness of the night had left us, and we had driven silently to the justice's house.

I didn't look at her again until we were well out of town heading for the Minnesota border, and then, where the river comes into sight, I pulled over on the shoulder and stopped. I took out my handkerchief, wiped her face, and then put my arms around her.

"It's all right, Mary." I lifted her face, one hand under her chin. "It's all right, baby, honest to God it's all right."

"Joey. Joe. Joey, Joey, Joey, Joey." She was crying again.

"It's all right, Mary." What was all right, that my family was waiting? That my kids would be goyim, that they'd play only with Gentiles and live with them, marry them as I had done? That for all the rest of my rotten, miserable life, wherever I went, I'd be a flogging traitor. That if I never went into a synagogue again, I'd feel a traitor always? What all right? What kind of all right was there in my life now? Damn me, now there was really a life, wasn't there? Every Jewess in the city pointing at me, running across them in the movies, and huddling together when they saw Mary and me. Never one thing or the other as long as I lived? What all right?

"It's all right, Mary."

"Are you sorry, Joe? Are you? You wanted to, didn't you, Joe? You're not mad, Joe, are you?"

"Mad." What did she know of me, my new wife? "What mad, cut it out, Mary." Still holding her, I got the car going once more and started for St. Paul.

I tried to be cheerful, honest I did. It was just no use;

maybe getting married and cheerful was too much for me in one day.

I had my family in my head.

We had lunch in Mankato, still not talking much, and headed on.

She asked what we were going to do, just as we drove out of Shakopee, maybe an hour from St. Paul.

"What do you mean, do, baby?"

"Joe, we're married."

I reached for her hand, kissed it, rubbed it along my cheek. "Baby." I laughed for her. "I don't know what we're going to do. I've got to tell my folks."

"Yes," she said.

"You've got to tell yours."

"Yes."

"I guess that'll be something, eh, Mary?"

"Yes, Joe."

"What's the matter now?" What else did she want, for Pete's sake?

"Nothing."

"What is it now, Mary?"

"We could see them together," she said. "Your family first—I wouldn't be afraid with you there—and then mine."

"Mary, no." I put my hand on her arm. "Mary, I don't want you to see them right away. They'll be mean, Mary."

"They won't if you don't let them."

"For cripes' sake, what do I have to do, fight them more? Haven't I—" I let the rest of that go.

"Haven't you done enough, Joe? That's it, Joe."

"Baby, no."

"Joe, you can quit. Quit, Joe, if you want. It's all right with me."

I just wanted to get back to town. I'd go home and tell them and maybe they'd see it. Otherwise I'd leave. Pack up, I guess, and get out, and that's all.

She asked me once more as we turned up Summit, past the park we had left maybe twelve hours before. "Joe, let me come with you."

"Baby, please. I'll do it, and I'll call you as soon as I'm able."

She didn't answer.

I didn't drop her on Summit. I drove to Portland and Snelling and, looking quickly, saw her father's car in front of their house down the block. I stopped on the far corner, still on Snelling Avenue, which T'd her block.

"I'll call you soon as I can, Mary. I love you."

"I love you, darling." She smiled the real smile for me. "We're fine now," she said. "Oh, Joe, I don't believe it still. Don't be angry with your folks, darling, give them a chance."

"Sure."

She held her hand to me, the dime ring on her finger. I kissed it. Then she made a fist of her hand and rubbed my scalp. "For our luck, darling." She left the car and walked down the street on the opposite side of her house.

I knew how much of a hero I was, leaving her alone now. I knew it right down the line, but there are some things you can't do. I couldn't go with her now, nor take her to my house.

When I stopped before the house, I saw Ma in the

window, looking out. What in the name of God was I going to tell them?

I stood for a minute in the street, getting the kinks out of my legs and my back, and then started up the walk. Phil pushed the screen door from inside, held it open with his hand. I walked past him and into the living room.

Except that he wore sport clothes my old man might never have left the couch. Ma was sitting in the big chair looking up at me. I walked across the room and sat in the other chair.

"Nu?" my mother shouted. "Nu, murderer, you're back?"

"Yep," I nodded. "I'm back."

"Don't be so wise," Phil said.

"Why don't you burn up?" Ma shouted. "Where were you?"

"I almost died last night, you care?" she shouted.

Not at the moment I didn't care.

"You got a mother, father, a brother, you care? Live for yourself, you care for the family? Go where you want, you care?"

"Ethel, shah," the old man said.

"You shah," she screamed. She was white with anger, really white. She wore no make-up. "I can talk. This is my house yet!" She pounded the arm of her chair with her fist. "My house here, not that 'shikseh' chaser. Runs with whores, with bastards, with who not? What kind of a low is he not with, your son, why didn't my milk curdle before I fed him?"

"Damn you," Phil said, "tell her where you were."

Well, *that* one was going to get it, if last night did nothing else. I pointed my finger at him. "The next time ever, now I'm telling you, ever. If you ever raise your voice again, if you ever swear, you dirty, sniveling rat, I'm going to break your dirty, stinking neck."

He started toward me and I rose. "Come on, you rat, I'll put you in the hospital for the rest of your life. You ever talk to *me* like that again."

He looked at Pa and an instant later the old man said: "Joe, please sit down."

Ma clasped her hands before her and started swaying from side to side. "Where was he?" she moaned. "Where was he? Where was he? I'm going to die, where was he?"

"Goddamit, I got married."

She screamed high and wild, raising her head to the ceiling, letting go with everything; an ancient, suffering, wailing scream that rose and rose and came back from the walls.

She screamed and swayed and started to beat the sides of her head with her fists and kick her feet on the floor. Phil got to her first and tried to hold her, but she slipped loose and dropped to the floor, her dress above her knees, screaming and screaming and screaming. My pa got to her and he and Phil picked her up, she still screaming. They held her arms so she couldn't beat herself and got her into the bedroom. I sat, waiting. They were in there a long time, and finally the old man came into sight.

He'd gotten older in those last few minutes. He was an old man now. When I saw him I went for the door, but

couldn't leave without talking. I waited in the doorway, my hand on the screen, half turned to him.

His arms were behind his back. I noticed his sport shirt was open at the neck and how tight the skin was. There was a little fold under his chin, and his eyes were old, really old.

He nodded. "She got you, Joe?"

"Yeah."

He nodded. "True, she got you?"

"Yeah."

He nodded. "Married? Good married, for sure?"

"Yeah."

He began to cry, weeping quietly, unashamedly, his hands still behind his back. I'd never seen him cry, not even when he learned his father was dead. "I like you so much, kid," he said. "My God, I like you, kid, more than her, sure, more than Phil, sure."

The tears came down his cheeks and ran along his jaw, but he stood still. "My God, kid, I like you once."

I lit another cigarette from the butt of the one in my mouth. There were a hundred scenes to think about, all of them crowding in on me, and now, after

remembering the marriage, I thought of that Sunday long ago at Mann Lake. It was a kidney-shaped pond no more than half a mile across at its widest, some forty miles out of St. Paul.

I can't remember now the name of the guy who owned the picnic grounds and riparian rights. In those days when I was a kid, before he raised the car price for Jews from fifty cents to three bucks, and before he always met you at the chain-barriered start of the driveway with his big, foolish, trying-to-look-cute smile to announce he was filled for the day, it was a standard Sunday spot for us.

Looking at it clearly now, I guess he was really the first man to show me that Gentiles didn't want *us*. All I'd learned was that no Jew I'd known till then had anything but hate for the goy.

We were still getting in when this happened. That Sunday was an all-day party. What with uncles and aunts and their kids, we were about forty in our gang. We were eating our dinners out of paper plates when I heard Pa hail this guy walking toward us. He was about the old man's age then, and he was dressed out of the book: white flannels, black-and-white shoes, sport shirt, and yellow tie. He seemed to know everybody there, but except from the old man he got nothing but nods and a few quiet hellos.

"Henry," he said, "I never see you no more."

"I live in St. Paul," the old man said, "where do you hide?"

"Look who talks hide!" the man said.

"I'm home," Pa answered, "all the time. Where's your missus?" he asked.

The man jerked his head toward the lake. "There, down there with the goyim. Where else?"

When he left a few minutes later the old man saw I was puzzled. "Man name Feinberg," he said. "Know him from the old country. Married Gentile woman here, that fool."

"Henry," my ma said. She bent to fill his glass with lemonade. "Don't talk with Joe about Feinberg, that pig. Let him lay in the ground with his goy. Who talks to that pig but you? Do you see anybody should talk with him?" Her arm covered the entire picnic area. "You hear a Jew calling Feinberg? Let him sit there with his pig, should be ashamed better to come here."

I'd seen my first man to marry a Gentile.

That night Pa invited some of the family home for ice cream. The talk got around to Feinberg, and in the midst of all the shaking of heads Pa started talking.

He said that in his town in Russia there was an old Jewish doctor who'd married a Gentile. Very respected man by the Russians, he'd said, and the Jews had to like him. He was the only medic.

When the old man was getting set to take Ma and us to America, the doctor came to him one day. "Take me with you," he said to Pa. "I have a little money, take me."

"Your wife," Pa said. "And the kids. You are a grandfather. You can't leave your wife."

"Yes," the doctor said. "Yes, I can leave her. I lived thirty years with a goy, that's enough. Take me with you."

Pa said he died three days before we left and his wife wanted to bury him in a Russian cemetery, but the law said no.

She had to bury him in the Jewish plot, and his kids wouldn't come to the funeral because the rabbi was there. Pa said he went out of respect and the woman didn't cry at all. He said when they let him down she walked close to the grave and looked down at him and walked away all alone.

When I got up from the chair it was almost eleven o'clock and my left foot had gone to sleep. I stamped around the big room, bringing the foot down hard until the needles fell away from my calf.

What to do? I could wash the dishes, couldn't I?

That was it. I'd get the place so clean she'd make up as soon as she came into the cabin. I'd get the kitchen first, leaving the coffeepot on the stove and a cup and saucer for me. Then make the beds and square away the bathroom, then use the vacuum cleaner.

I'd get sandwiches ready for whenever she came and warm some potato chips, and maybe, if it got cool, buy some popcorn later and light a fire.

I didn't want to be mad. I wanted no fights. I just wanted to put my arms around her and keep her back turned on the Club. Pick her up and carry her to the chair before the fire. Stroke her hair and have her fall asleep.

The kitchen looked so lonely. I got a flame under the coffee, used a damp rag on the table, and washed and dried a cup, saucer, and spoon.

I'm a good dishwasher. I learned with Mary. Me, I like washing dishes with her. I like anything as long as it's with her. Like I always told Mary: "You wash, baby. I'll dry. Not a damn thing you can do to stop me when your hands are full of suds." I liked to bend over and kiss her neck. Maybe I never figured that she could stop me with wet hands easier than with dry—if she'd wanted to.

There's a window just over the sink, and after I'd stacked the dishes I filled the sink with suds. Then, as I lowered the first handful into the water, a breeze came up from the lake and the curtain cord swayed.

The rag monkey tied to the cord swayed too.

I pushed it with my wet forefinger and it moved from side to side, hitting the curtains. I held onto the sink, watching it, then, as its swing lessened, pushed it hard and it fell into the water before I could catch it.

When I lowered my hand to get the monkey, it slipped from my fingers and fell in once more, and this time I scooped it up with both hands, took it to the table, and set it down gently.

I went into the bathroom for a towel and returned to wipe it free of suds, but the maroon cover had turned

dirty brown. I wrapped it carefully in the towel, put it on the window sill in the breakfast nook, and got myself a cup of coffee.

I'd bought the monkey for Mary the first night I saw her.

She came up to the city room at the *News* about a quarter of ten that Sunday night in October. There were four of us at the desk, just sitting around. I was through at ten and except that I'd promised some guys I'd show up at a tri-state Hadassah convention dance in the Gopher Hotel, I would have been gone.

There wasn't an unmarried Jewish girl from twenty-one to forty-one in Minnesota and the two Dakotas who didn't make the convention her own scalping grounds. I was in no hurry.

There is a wall in our city room as high as a saloon bar, just a thin pine barrier with a planed-down and varnished two-by-four atop it.

I was reading the Chicago comics when Bill Bird, the city editor, said quietly: "Joe, take care of the talent over there."

I saw only her face and hands, and the red kerchief over her head, for she was leaning on the wall. I got copy paper and a pencil and walked over, smiling for the customer.

I said hello and she said hello. "Can I leave something here for the paper?" she asked.

I liked her face. She smiled so beautifully.

"Sure. What is it?"

She gave me a double-spaced sheet of paper with an

alumni notice for her college sorority. "Tomorrow all right?" I asked. In St. Paul the citizen can get a notice of a three-man poker game in the *News*.

"Swell," she smiled.

"The sorority," I said. "That's out at school, isn't it?"

She nodded. I knew now I wanted to see her tonight. "I was in school with you, Joe." I must have blushed immediately. She laughed. "You *were* editor, you know, and your name *is* on the articles you write here. You're important."

"You're ribbing me." I enjoyed it.

She laughed loudly. "Of course I am. I'm sorry. My name is Mary Simpson and I don't mean to rib"—I know she'd never used that word before—"rib you, Joe."

"All right. We're even. Who's waiting in the car downstairs?"

She blinked.

"Who's waiting in the car for you downstairs, cripes, you're not alone on a Sunday night?"

She turned completely, as though looking for a thread on her clothes. "I am so alone," she said, joining in with me.

"I'll buy coffee," I said. Hell with Hadassah.

"What?"

"I'll—buy—us—coffee. I'll—take—us—out—to—Payne Avenue—for—the—festival."

I had nothing to lose. It was the Hadassah for me anyway. I could see her searching for the right thing to say. She had moved back from the wall, but she couldn't find a place for her hands, they just got in the way all the

time. Then she put them atop the wall. From the looks of her nails and her face and the still-damp hair under the kerchief I knew all right she'd spent the day in the bathroom.

"Well," she said. She tugged gently at the ends of the kerchief under her chin. "Can you just leave?"

"Just leave with you, Mary." Joe, the charmer. Boy, the guts I had when there was a roomful of men behind me, watching the party.

"Well," she said.

I patted her hand. "You stay right here. Don't move. Don't look up at whistles. Don't answer questions. Just stand."

I went to wash up, ran wet fingers through my hair, combed it quickly, and found my coat on a desk in the back of the city room. I came down toward her on the outside of the wall and I've never forgotten how pleased I was that she was tall, nor the complete pleasure at the sight of her legs. They were lovely, the loveliest legs I'd ever seen.

The city desk and the copy desk were all watching, and it made me a little cocky, being able to walk out with this girl whom I hadn't ever seen ten minutes before.

I put my arm through hers, spreading my fingers along her coat. Then I stopped, patted her arm, and left her there, to take her story to the city desk.

"That's not one of your dogs, Joe," Bill Bird whispered.

"I know, Papa."

"You don't know and I'm telling you. Be a good boy,

and maybe she'll let you see her again. She's Yacht Club talent."

I buttoned my coat. "They eat three meals a day out there too, don't they?"

He took his cigarette out of his mouth. "Yep. And her old man shaves himself too, but they smell a hell of a lot better than we do."

"All right. All right, Poppa." I slapped his back. "I won't disgrace the *News*." Walking away from him, I thought he'd been out of line. I'd gone to school with some of those Club people. I spotted them at the Gopher Hotel's bar. The only thing I saw they had was the ability to get through an evening spending less money than lobs like me.

"Ready for sure," I told her when I took her arm again. "You haven't got a car down here, have you?" I'd brought the old man's to work.

She shook her head. "No. No, Joe. I walked down Grand to Dale and took the trolley there."

"Good. I've got one."

I drove out Kellogg Boulevard toward the East Side. The Payne Avenue festival was an annual party given by the businessmen in the area. I'd written most of the paper's stories on the gala this year and had thought of it maybe because it was far enough away from the Hadassah dance.

And maybe because I knew there wouldn't be a Jew there to see her with me and start the tongues in town.

"You're waiting for me to say I don't often do this," she said. "Let a man pick me up."

"Who picked you up? Weren't there ten guys in the city room saw me ask you?"

She shook her head, looking at the windshield. "It isn't really the thing, Joe."

"Well, you can't go home. You're stuck."

"You're stuck too," she said.

"You're better than molasses candy."

"I was never stuck to molasses," she said.

"You're stuck with me. Tonight you are."

She pushed her legs out, shoving her hands in her coat. "That I am, that I am. Tonight I'm stuck with Joe." Then she wagged a finger at me. "I don't know half the words you use, Joey." That was the first time she ever said it. "But just for tonight. I'm a little old to commit myself."

"Old!"

"I'm nearly twenty-four, Joe. Three years away from college. My mother worries and my father worries. My friends worry." She turned in her seat. "Joe, should I worry because I'm not married?"

"Mary, if nobody wants to marry you, call on me. I'm your friend."

She laughed. "You mean, any time I ask you, you'll marry me?"

"Any time."

"Promise?"

"Swear," I said.

She, seriously: "Joe, you've given me something to live for." Bowing her head: "I'm tremendously grateful."

"Nothing." I waved my hand. "Nothing."

We parked on a side street off Payne Avenue and

walked to the lights. She held my arm, walking along with me, smiling and talking, laughing occasionally, and I thought, this is a wonderful girl. I thought, here she walks into the city room and in ten minutes we're out of the place. I thought, she's a damn good-looking girl. And those legs. Talking the way she had, easy and free, telling me things. Nearly twenty-four. This one knew what time it was.

Figuring it right there, maybe there was an even-money chance I could get in the hay with her tonight. She was nearly twenty-four. This wasn't a baby out of high school. No date on Sunday night; maybe the field was narrowing down for her. I didn't know whether to call the clerk at the Gopher or wait and see how it went.

"I like festivals, Joe," she said.

"Me too," I told her. "Any kind but the Jewish ones."

That stopped her. We walked into Payne Avenue and turned up the street, closed to traffic now and strung with lights. "Joe," she said, "I want to ask you something."

"Sure."

"Why is it that immediately I meet a Jew he or she has to tell me about it?"

I put my hand over hers. "Mary, it's a long boring story, and I'll be damned if I know why. All I know is that you saved me from the Hadassah dance."

"What's a Hadassah dance?" I steered her to an ice-cream stand, bought us two cones and gave her the chocolate, watching her face light up, before I answered.

"A Hadassah dance is one thousand unmarried dogs down from the sticks trying to find a man in three days."

"That's a cruel thing to say," she answered.

"It's a cruel thing they do."

"But you're not nice to your own people," she protested.

"Why should we be, Mary? Nobody else is." I threw my cone to the curb. "Ah, forget that talk. Let's have a party."

We met some of the officials of the festival, and I felt pleased as always, when these minor big shots greeted me with the big hello, made a fuss over me. Mary enjoyed it. We went into a hardware store and had a few drinks in the back room with the owner. Then into a radio shop and some more cheer. I was walking softly and lightly in an hour, and she was laughing louder than she had.

"I'm with a celebrity," she said when we started up the avenue alone again. Nodding her head: "This is Joe, my date, and he's a big celebrity." She stopped two kids who passed. "This is Joe, he's a celebrity," she said. They couldn't be mad at her, smiling and happy as she was. I wanted to call the Gopher for a room but still figured I'd wait a little.

We got some hamburgers up the street and gulped them down with black coffee. We made the tour back on the other side of the street and midway down she saw the monkey.

"Joe, isn't he the cutest thing?" she squealed.

I had to get it, that's all.

It cost me two bucks trying to knock three wooden bottles down, but I did it. She loved the thing, took it to her heart and rubbed its head and said now she'd never be afraid to sleep at night.

"Don't be afraid, lovely," I said. "Call me."

"You work nights, Joe."

"I'll quit."

"N-o," she decided. "If you're going to marry me, we best have a job to support me."

"Marry you tonight," I said.

She looked up at me. "That's enough, Joe, isn't it? I'm sorry, it was my fault, but let's not talk about marry any more."

"Okay."

"I hear it all the time," she said. "They're on me all the time."

"Okay." She needed sympathy, this one.

"Let's talk about you."

"Okay."

"What do you want, Joe?" We were on the side street once more, walking toward our car.

I touched her nose with my forefinger. "You."

"Really, Joe. What do you want?"

"You."

"Joe." She wasn't shocked nor annoyed. She just wanted to get off that.

"All right, I don't want you. I'm a liar. You're the homeliest woman I've ever set eyes on. I don't know why the hell I took you with me." I bent to kiss her hair, pushing the red kerchief back. "But I'm a good kid."

"Joe." She stopped. "Don't pay mind to me tonight. I'm a black mood tonight, Joe."

That was good, black moods: In a black mood she sure needed friends. "Come on, we'll take a ride. We're near

Phalen Park. Or I'll drive you to the beacon at Mounds Park. What you need is wind in your hair."

"That's what I need, Joe. Wind in my hair."

What would you figure? Wouldn't you think you were in? A dark night for her, brooding and thinking and telling it to the first man she saw. Wanting to sit up by the beacon. What the hell, she knew you didn't go to Mounds Park for charades.

I turned off the parkway and eased up to the retaining wall which looked south toward Pig's Eye and Tanner's Lake. There wasn't another car in the parking space and I let the bumpers touch the wall before I pulled the emergency brake. I found some music on the radio, held the lever and pushed the seat back, then sat watching her, she with her head on the cushion, the kerchief off her hair now, her face in profile as she looked down at the airport and the string of lights bordering the field.

"Hello," I said. I found her hand.

She didn't turn. "Hello, Joe."

"How's lovely?" I asked.

"I'm not lovely. Isn't it peaceful here, Joe?"

"Um-humm." I put my hand on the cushion, played with her hair. She didn't chase me. I sat thus for a few minutes more, running my fingers along her neck. Then I bent my head and kissed her on the lips, and I remember this as clearly and as fully now, this minute, out here alone in our cabin, as though it had happened this morning.

I remember all of it, the breeze coming in from the

window, the feel of her head against my arm as she let it fall back on the cushion, her cheek under my fingers as I moved her face, and her lips cool and soft, so soft that I seemed to sink into them as they held mine.

Kissing her, I could feel it all through me, so that even thus I seemed to be making love to her with all of my body.

I put my left arm about her and brought her to me and kissed her again, and then, as my hand slipped from her shoulder, she brought her arm up, so that I held only her wrist.

"Joe," she said. "No."

I kissed her once more, and I'm telling you now that I couldn't stop, I just couldn't quit. I moved her hand down and held it and then suddenly brought mine up and touched her breast.

She sat up, moving easily away from me. She turned quickly so that I was bent awkwardly all alone, and she said, looking down at me: "All right, Joe. Thanks very much and let's take Mary home."

I straightened up. "Holy smokes, don't be mad."

She shook her head. "I'm not mad, Joe. I'm fine and I had a good evening, but now let's go home."

I knew very well she'd been had, but always when I blank out I feel a little foolish and apologetic. "I didn't want to get out of line." What else was it? "Don't be mad." To hell with you, sister, I thought, I'll take you home and quick.

There wasn't a word said until we were in the Loop and then I realized I didn't know where she lived.

"On Portland, Joe," she said when I asked, "1498 just off Snelling." That wasn't Yacht Club territory, but I didn't give a damn any more. A one-shot was just that, and I was out maybe three bucks. It was better than Hadassah.

Still there was that remorse with this girl. I didn't know why. Maybe because she had been so pleasant, maybe it was the first time out for her, one of those rules, maybe she really had had a bad day.

"I wasn't that naughty you can't talk," I said.

She smiled, but it was an effort. "Not you, Joe, I'm not angry with you. I'm angry with Mary."

"Nuts to her," I said.

"Nuts to her. Right."

"Man can try," I said.

"Right," she said.

"Ain't no fines for trying."

"Right," she said.

"Hell of a world if a man didn't try."

"They all do," she said wryly.

"All right, I'm sorry, baby. Now let's make nice talk for another ten minutes."

"Right," she said.

There wasn't another word spoken until we were standing on the steps before the porch of her house. She was facing me, back to the screen door, her left hand holding the knob. "Well," she said.

I was on the second step. "Let me call you," I said seriously.

"Right." She knew as well as I that I'd never call.

"Good." I nodded. "Good." I would really have liked to kiss her once more.

"Thanks, Joe," she said.

"You're a good girl." I took one step down, then turned to face her. "You're a good girl. Good night, pretty."

"Good night, Joe."

"I'll call you."

"Right," she said, pulling the kerchief wide. It looked black in the darkness.

Monday all day I just thought she was a fool. I couldn't very well call myself flunk for not making the grade. Except that she was with me most of the evening at work, and I had to evade all the questions. Bill Bird asked me if I had fun, and when I nodded he bent his head to the copy.

She was with me Tuesday. I wake late, usually never planning for that night and Wednesday, my two days off. I played handball at the Y in the afternoon, passed up the fights in Minneapolis, and decided to go home for dinner.

I didn't want to see a movie and I didn't want to call any of the bums I knew. I sat around until about nine, knowing I'd phone her but putting it off as long as I could.

A woman, her mother maybe, said she wasn't home and asked who was calling. I said a friend and hung up. Now I *was* mad. I should have been angry with myself, waiting like that, but it was directed absolutely unreasonably at her.

In the living room once more, I asked the old man where the keys to his car were. "Where do you go nine o'clock at night?" my ma asked.

"No place."

She looked up at the old man. "That I get from him. No place, or my business, or out. Dumb he should be, then maybe I wouldn't ask."

"On the icebox, the keys, Joe," the old man said. We'd had a refrigerator for years but it was icebox to him.

While I was getting my coat from the hall closet she was talking to the old man, beating me up for being a bum and wastrel, and why didn't I find a girl like Phil, weren't there enough nice Jewish girls around for me to find? Didn't any of them please me, Mr. Big Shot? Was I too good for every woman in town? I walked out on that and drove into the Loop.

I walked into three bars, had drinks in two of them, and moseyed over to the grill at the Gopher Hotel.

In St. Paul there are maybe half a dozen bars worth being in, and the saloon with the least number of Jews was the grill. I liked it best. It got the young married set of St. Paul Fire and Marine and Pioneer Building lawyers, and the easy-drinking Irish, and enough of the Summit Avenue mob to give it class.

She was sitting at a table, one hand fingering a necklace of tiny beads. Two girls flanked her.

I saw her as I walked in. She was wearing a suit that showed a white blouse and her hair was on top of her head, piled up away from her neck. She was bent over the table, talking to one of them. I had never been happier.

I walked to the bar, back to her table, got a drink, turned and waited for her to see me. When she raised her head she spotted me immediately, and then she began to blush and I started to blush and I couldn't take my eyes away.

Nor did she.

I set the drink down, walking carefully toward her, taking off my coat as I threaded through the tables. "Hello," I said.

"Hello, Joe. Sit down." She introduced me to the two crows with her and I ordered a round. Then the music began and I asked her to dance.

She got up, pulling the skirt away from her behind, so that it hung loose from her waist. She never wore a girdle, I learned this later, and was always afraid that her clothes would stick to her behind.

She fit against me like we were two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. I got my arm all around her so I was holding her elbow, and I couldn't let go.

"I called you," I said.

"Did you?"

"Woman answered. Said you were out."

"Mother," she said. She took her arm from my back to tug at her skirt again and then returned it, letting her fingers get lost in my hair.

"Thinking of you all day," I said. "And yesterday." Why didn't I shut up? What kind of talk was this? I'd wanted to lay this girl.

"Me, Joe," she said. "Me too."

I wanted to kiss her. I wanted never to let her go. It

seemed to me, dancing with her, that all my life there had been a hole in me and now it had just been filled and I felt complete holding her.

"The girls," I said.

"Sorority sisters from Duluth, Joe. They're staying here."

"Can't we go away?"

"Yes, darling, we can go away."

"Let's go now," I said. "Just away. I don't want to go to bed, don't think that."

"I don't think that. Dance some more, Joe."

"Yes." Then: "I want to kiss you, Mar'."

She looked up at me. "Say Mar', Joe."

"Mar'."

"Nobody ever called me that."

"Mar'," I said. "Like a she-horse," I said. "I want to kiss you, Mar'."

"Of course, darling," she said.

I sat in the nook, touching the wet monkey's foot which stuck out from the towel. What chance did we have, even from the start? How fall in love with a woman who was actually *verboden*? She was a goy, and

I knew all Gentiles were against us from the time I was ten. We lived on Colorado and Greenwood then, in a neighborhood of section hands, South St. Paul stockyards workers, and still poorer Jews. Even at that age Ma had gotten most of her points across: I always had to be in shouting distance, and there were certain things I couldn't do. One of them was using my sled anywhere but on the short hill behind the house.

Most of the kids slid on the hill across the street which started from the dead end of Greenwood and ran down to near the railroad tracks. Not me. I had to slide behind the house, and so did most of the Jew-boys in the neighborhood.

This one Saturday there was a wonderful snow on the ground, fresh-fallen and deep, powdery and magnificent for sliding. Ma had taken Phil to the dentist downtown and warned me to stay on the short hill behind the house. She said she'd be home around two o'clock.

She wasn't a block away when I was across the street. I slid there for about a half hour and then Jack Mike, one of the Syrian kids, said he'd heard about a wonderful hill up on Wabasha and Isabel, on a terrace there. It was clear away from the street, he said, there were three or four levels and you got a chance in one slide to hit each of these jumps and still have plenty of room to finish out your slide. It sounded wonderful, and he had twenty takers in a minute. I couldn't stay here alone.

We walked the half mile carrying our sleds, taking running slides across the playground, behind Crowley School and along Livingstone Avenue when the road was clear.

The hill was a beauty, jammed with kids, running parallel to the Isabel hill and as safe as my bed. I guess up to then I'd never had a better afternoon.

I forgot Ma and the old man and Phil and what my name was, I guess. We went down that hill alone, in pairs, one on top of the other, in teams of three and four sleds, each kid flat on his stomach, holding to the legs of the fellow in front of him. We slid down on flats of tin, on bushel covers, in bushels.

It must have been four-thirty before we left, tired and wet and singing and yelling and still enough poop left to run-slide home.

She was on the back porch, one of Pa's sweaters over her shoulders, when I turned down Greenwood. The first thing I saw, she was shaking her finger at me, and the other kids started razzing me. I came down the middle of the street alone, my sled dragging, all the fun out of me and wondering what she'd do: lick me or scream all the night.

I carried the sled up the stairs. She'd gone inside, and when I came in she was sitting across the table from the old man, Phil between them eating and looking smug.

"He can go only with *shkutzem*; Jewish boys aren't good enough for him," she said.

I got out of my clothes.

"Tell me one Jewish boy," she said, "one, who goes with them pigs. Only my son, runs to the pigs, they hate him like poison."

I went to the icebox for milk. "Wait, Joe," she said, "I'll give supper." Then, turning to my father, "Can't you tell

him, show him, he should stay away from those pig goyim?" She was speaking quietly, hadn't raised her voice once.

"Joe," the old man said. "Come here." I sat down across from Phil while Ma got to the stove. "Aren't there enough Jewish boys for you?" he asked.

"Sure," I said.

"Why do you have to run with goyim?" he asked.

"Holy smokes," I said, "I don't run with them. I see 'em once in a while. Holy smokes, they live across the street, all around us, I can't hide from them."

"True," he said. "You right. Can't hide. See them in school, fine, say hello, be nice. See them on the street, fine, be nice. That's enough. You see me and Ma we should go to their houses?"

"No. But you're older."

"Sure, older. But we go to other houses. I play cards little, Ma plays, we got friends. We go once, you should remember, to a goy's house?"

"No."

"Do me a favor, hell with them. They hate you, kid, you understand me." He put his hand on my head, pulled it toward him, and kissed my hair. "They hate us, would better every Jew dead for them. Take my word." He rapped on the table. "Nu, enough. Give eat, Ma, we have supper. Then we all four going to movies, celebrate."

"Celebrate what?" Phil asked.

"Celebrate we got two good boys. Huh, Ma?"

She was sitting now too. "I got the best boys," she said.

She leaned over to kiss me. "If Joe don't eat everything, can't go." They all laughed. I ate more than all of them.

"We leave the dishes," Pa said. "Better go early before drunken pigs come to the movies."

I got myself another cup of coffee, bringing it back to the nook. I sat down, my back against the wall, my feet hanging over the side of the booth.

Why should I remember my cousin Frankie now, and Estelle, and that night in St. Joseph's Hospital? Why that, it was maybe twelve years old?

It's as clear now, today, as though I had just left him alone, the room quiet and him sleeping from the needle at last. I drove his mother home, worried and fretful for the surgery the next day, but triumphant at last.

He'd had five years of a nightmare. I had seen most of it, watching him sneak and lie and cheat and drag himself and a fine woman down into misery, until he'd gotten ulcers and they had become so bad he needed surgery.

I was still in college then, working as a copy boy. He went into the hospital Saturday afternoon, called me in an hour to pick up Estelle.

I didn't know she was leaving for New York. I didn't

know until two days later that he'd called her, begged her to come down to the hospital. She was quiet, not talking, as I drove her down, and I remember she wore a huge sunbonnet hat.

I left them alone in the room and sat in the waiting room, the smell of antiseptic in my nostrils and the nuns moving quietly and efficiently through the halls.

Then my aunt came in. She'd never seen Estelle, I knew that, and when she asked me what I was doing there I said Frankie was sleeping. "I'll go sit with him," she said.

I was out of my chair, holding her arm. "No, Auntie, let him sleep."

"Will I wake him?"

"The doctor said to let him sleep."

"By me the doctor can lay in the ground. In hell with the pig. The doctor isn't the boss on me." She walked toward the room, a formidable woman, big and heavy, wearing an apron.

"Auntie, please don't go in." I was terrified of what would happen. I walked ahead of her. "I'll see if he's sleeping, Auntie."

When I busted in, Estelle was sitting on the bed, her hand in Frankie's hair, and he held her with one hand on her arm.

"Frankie," I began. "Your mother, Frank, cripes, she's here." Then I heard my aunt come in and, without turning, heard her gasp as she swallowed her breath.

"Away from my son, whore," she began. Estelle moved off the bed, stood near her chair, bewildered.

"Mrs. Schneider," she said. "Please, Mrs. Schneider."

"Out of my room, whore," my aunt shouted. I closed the door. "Out, streetwalker, out of my room, whore."

Frank was near crazy. His face was white and he looked from Estelle to his mother. "Ma," he said.

She didn't look at him, but raised her finger at Estelle. "You whore, you, put my son in the hospital, ruined him, ruined me, my family, I can't hold up my head in the street no place. Leave already, whore, aren't you satisfied yet, you put him here, enough."

"Ma," Frank said. "Ma, I want to get married." He used the same voice as a murderer in the electric chair asking for clemency, and he sounded as though he expected as much.

My aunt put her hands to her face and tried to tear flesh from her cheeks. "No," she shuddered. "No, son, no." She slapped her cheeks. "No, son, I'll die. I'll kill myself, Frank. No. Frank, I'll kill myself." She fell to the bed, her knees on the floor, sobbing into the covers, moaning. Frank looked at her, put his hand on her hair, and in a voice from which all life and hope had left he said: "All right, Ma. All right."

Then he turned to Estelle, his hand still on his mother's shoulder. She didn't cry, she didn't say anything. She reached for her purse and walked around the bed and stopped at the doorway. I didn't know then she was leaving that night.

"Frankie," she said.

He watched five years of his life wrapping themselves up and he could only look at her, his mother there on the floor sobbing.

"Oh, Frankie," she said, as though he were guilty of the most horrible crime.

He held himself tight and I saw his left hand on the sheet, the fingers spread.

"Oh, Frankie," she said, and then she left.

He looked up at me. "Get her, Joe," he ordered. "For God's sake, get her. Get her, Joe."

I didn't move. His mother rose and went to the bathroom beside his bed, and then in a moment she emerged, her face clean and her eyes holding victory in them. "Sleep, Frankie," she said. No mention of Estelle. "Sleep, son, sleep. I'll bring you soup tonight. Come, Joe, drive me home."

He told me a week later that he'd called Estelle, paging her in the Union Station in Chicago, but she wouldn't come back. She'd been licked by the champ.

How many others did I know? Sam Cardozo, the district judge, almost fifty, living with his mother, and two or three nights a week downtown with his girl, she almost as old as him, her beauty gone and a hard, mean look in her face. The Jewish community loved him, he couldn't do it to his mother, you see, and this I swear is true and I can prove it: the Gentiles respected him for it, his fidelity to his mother brought him votes.

Max Fisher, the furniture buyer at the Bargain Mart, eight years with that blonde, she grown fat and he bald, and never sleeping home on Saturday night, having torn those twenty-four hours of love from a reluctant family who held him yet.

Morris Portugal and his Betty. We'd all three gone to

school together. He ran a chain women's shoe store, starting after high-school graduation, and made now more than a hundred dollars a week. I told him one hundred times to get a transfer, get out of town and leave her alone. I told him as many times to marry her, that his family would get used to it. How many times had she called me, begging me to do something, for, you see, she had tried to quit. Oh yes, they all *try*, and these two had. But he still rented rooms for the night in the Gopher Hotel.

Bob Bernstein and Marge. I got to know him after high school, when I started playing handball to keep in shape. Her father was a millionaire. He was a vice-president of the biggest ski-manufacturing company in the country.

That was really something. She'd quit after three years, really quit. She went to Los Angeles, stayed there three months, and came back with a husband, while Bob had a nervous breakdown, lost one job, quit another, and walked the streets alone. I mean just that; he could be seen that year at night, his hands behind him like an old man, going down Kellogg Boulevard to Lambert's Landing behind the wholesale hardware house and looking at the river. Moving slowly through the innumerable deserted avenues which make up any city's business district, those forlorn streets buried below huge darkened buildings and as eerie in the night as tombstones.

When she got back he perked up. I could see it on him, and he told me why. "I know who's laying her, Joe," he said one day. "This way my head is still, and this lob is married to her and Marge doesn't cheat. When she was

in L.A. all I could see was her in bed with a hundred guys. I used to walk around trying to bang it out, but she stayed there on white sheets."

Marge and her new husband lasted six months. A month after she got back she was pregnant, and three weeks after that she passed Bob on the street.

That was all. We got Bob in the locker room at the Y one night after he'd seen her the first time and told him to blow town. There were three other Jew boys and myself, his friends, and I swear he promised.

Some promise. It's two years now. Marge has a son; the husband went back to L.A. She lives with her folks, and those nights when Bob doesn't see her he finds a deserted phone booth and talks to her for three hours.

Tommy Kahn. I never knew his girl, but this gets around among us in as much detail as crap-game winners. His father was president of B'nai B'rith, an officer of the Temple Beth Sholom, chairman of every Jewish relief drive the city ever had.

He got married. For two weeks and never a night under the same roof with his wife. He'd knocked her up, and she, with no malice, but the miserable, embracing urge to have him once and always, would not submit to abortion unless she were married.

He'd promised, sure; just let her get rid of it and they'd be married, the next day, hell, that same day. But she loved him and she knew him, and this time she sat with all the cards. He drove her over to Wisconsin and married her one morning. That afternoon she submitted to the abortion.

But his old man had learned of it. Born in this country, right in St. Paul, raised there, member of the bar, a good citizen. He had that marriage blinked in two weeks. He took Tommy out of the university, sent him off to Fordham, and let the Jesuits take over. He lived in a dormitory on the campus, and two summers in a row the old man had him in one of Weyerhaeuser's lumber camps in Washington. His old man could do it.

Who else? I could talk the day through offering case histories. Herb Kamm and his girl that turned Jewish.

How many good, Christian young women offered to turn Jewish? She was a nice girl, too, I liked her. That's the gimmick, cripes, you figure that there should have been dogs among all these women, bums, chippies, broads out to get what they could. With the Jew boys these girls never got anything but heartbreak, and maybe a housecoat, a pair of lounging pajamas, a wrist watch, depending on how many birthdays and how many Christmases they'd known each other.

About Herb Kamm. He had it all figured out. Yes, he did. He had his girl going to Rabbi Aaronson three days a week for instructions, or whatever it's called. I don't know the name. Then when she was all set to switch, so they could be married by a rabbi, he presented his case to his family.

They imported some mocky from Milwaukee with plenty of dough behind her and had him married within six months. And his girl got married. And never a month they didn't get together at least once.

Ah, that's enough. I don't mean to sound glib, I'm just

presenting facts. Sure, I know everybody doesn't marry whom he should, but holy smokes, this was wholesale. How many could I name? Hundreds. Hundreds, and in Minneapolis maybe thousands; there were twice as many Jews and twice as many Gentiles over there.

So I knew what there was for me. I was walking into a crap game with loaded dice; I *couldn't* seven out. I could maybe stand a long time trying to make my point, but I couldn't be a loser. Not a chance. I'd have some fun for a few months and then just tell her no marriage, we quit now before we're really in over our heads. I had warning, and experience, I was all right.

One thing, her family was smart from the go. They must have figured that if they raised a smell she'd see me anyway, so in all the time, especially that first year, I was Mr. Big in the house.

That second night was Tuesday, and I saw her again Wednesday night. I called her from the Y and had her meet me at the Gopher.

Saturday and Sunday nights I work until ten. She came downtown Saturday, but the next day when I got to work and called, she said to come up and get her.

"We'll waste so much time, baby," I said.

"Joe, we've got so much time."

"Yeah, but I don't know how late I'll be working. Come on down. I'll send a cab for you."

"Joey, please," she said. "I've been telling the folks about you and they want to meet you, darling."

"Jeez, I'm not even dressed, Mary."

"You're beautiful."

She could do it all right. My voice softened. "You're beautiful, Mary."

She laughed delightedly. "I'm beautiful," she said. "I'm beautiful." I knew she'd turned her head away from the mouthpiece an inch or two. "That's what Joey says," she continued. "I'm beautiful. Yes, I am, I surely am."

"You're an angel."

"I'm an angel," she said.

"You're a love."

"I'm a love."

"You're breath-taking." I was almost whispering now.

"Oh, Joe, don't stop."

"You're the loveliest woman in the world." I got so warm talking like that.

"Oh. Oh. Oh." She breathed into the phone. "Joey, your voice. You just ruin me with your voice."

"Baby, I haven't got a car. Come on down, please."

"Joe, no. You have to come tonight. I told them you would."

"All right. I'll get a trolley. As near to ten-thirty as I can. I don't want to keep them awake."

Her house is in a block of old, big homes, built around 1900 when the citizens with money were trying to get away from the Irish who were then flooding the town.

There was a soft light burning downstairs, off to one side of the house, and a softer lamp upstairs. I walked onto a huge screened porch and pressed a buzzer at the side of an open door through which I could see stairs to one side and a hall running straight through to a kitchen.

I saw an immense living room to my right as a man came through an arch into the hall and toward me. He was a lean man, maybe fifty-five or so, almost bald, wearing sport clothes, and as brown as a berry. He was really tanned, beautifully built, and I got the feeling he was a young man.

"Joe," he said, smiling at me, his hand out, the other arm raised, ready to embrace me. "Welcome to the Simpson castle." Holy smokes, I wondered what she'd told them.

"How are you, sir?" I asked. He had his arm around my shoulders and I didn't like it at all. What had she told them?

"In the pink, Joe. Went around Sunrise Ridge in eighty-eight today. How's that for an old dog?" I knew Sunrise Ridge all right. Jews couldn't even caddy out there.

"Who's an old dog?" I can be a charmer too, when I want. "I'd hate to go three rounds with you, sir."

"We're never going to fight, Joe," he said. Cripes, what was I in here? "Mother"—he still had his arm around me—"here is Joe Goodman."

I could see the spots of white skin on her hands, where the golf gloves were cut. She was as tanned as he, as lean, with Mary's hair, almost bleached from the sun, and, I noticed, Mary's legs. She was, even at her age, a strikingly beautiful woman. She sat in a large chair before the grand piano, and on a small table beside her was a stack of magazines and newspapers and an open pack of Kools.

She gave me her hand. Shaking it, I knew she could drive two hundred yards. Cripes, she was strong.

"Hello, Joe," she said.

"Hello, Mrs. Simpson." I was nervous. I wanted out and fast. Thinking of it now, I hadn't been in a Gentile house—outside of a story, of course—since I was in high school. Bill Bird's, sure, but what the hell, he was like my own father. He wasn't Gentile, he wasn't anything.

"Mary went up to shower again," Mrs. Simpson explained. "You've made a school child of that girl, young man."

"She's made a schoolboy of me, Mrs. Simpson."

"What are you drinking, Joe?" he asked.

"Pass, sir. We're meeting some people and I'll have to drink with them."

Maybe they were disappointed at the news, I can't say for sure. One thing, I wasn't spending any time in that house, now or ever. "Do you golf, Joe?" the old man asked.

"A little."

"We'll have to go around one day. I've got some extra clubs in my locker," he said.

They'd post him for bringing me into the locker room. I didn't want him being nice to me; he didn't mean it, and if this was to be his method, being nice to me while knowing that his daughter wouldn't permanently take up with a Jew boy, then I'd be pleasant. I didn't have to see him.

"I'll remember that, sir."

He looked past me. "Hello, darling," he said. I turned

to see Mary just coming off the stairs and I was all warm again. I didn't care if her old man ran the Portland Avenue bund, if there was one.

She looked up from pulling at her dress. "Hi," she said. "Hello, Mary."

She got a chair and began dragging it over. "Mary, I don't want to break up a party, but Bill Bird and his wife are waiting for us in Mendota."

She was really disappointed. "Oh," she said. "All right, Joe." She went to a closet for her coat, came back with it and carrying leather gloves.

"Joe, I must tell you how much I like those articles you write," the old boy said.

"Well, thank you very much, sir." I wanted out. I didn't *like* Gentiles. I didn't belong with them, because they didn't want me, and I didn't like them because there isn't a Gentile living likes me. They don't, and damn me if I lie.

I held Mary's coat while she got into it, and then waited while she went for her car keys. The good nights were pleasant enough, although their disappointment was obvious. I held the porch door open for Mary, but she stood on the steps waiting for me to join her. She was silent while we walked to her car, and not until we were sitting inside did she say it.

"Joe, we aren't seeing Bill Bird. I don't even know him." I'd lied enough. "No."

"Then why did you say it?"

I was quiet.

"Why, Joe?"

"I'm Jewish, Mary," I said quietly.

"Yes. You told me."

"Well," I said.

"Well?"

"You're not."

She turned to me and there was fear in her eyes, real fear, the first time I'd seen it. "What does that mean, Joe?"

I wanted no arguments. "Not tonight, angel. We don't want to argue. We don't know each other but a week. You have to take it easy with me, Mary. Just believe me. We Jews are funny people."

"You have to take it easy with me, Joe." She was twisting her fingers.

I was behind the wheel. As I bent to kiss her, I saw her father standing on the porch looking at me. I wasn't fooling him.

I used three coats of cleanser on the sink until the enamel shone. I pulled the stop plug out and rinsed the sink again and again, letting the warm water run over my hands until the tips of my fingers puckered.

There was no hurry. Working slowly, I'd have the cabin ready for white-glove inspection when she came.

I spread the *News* on the floor, emptied the garbage into it, and carried it out near the garage. I swept the floor completely, ran a damp mop over the linoleum, and left the monkey in the sun to dry.

Then I found the vacuum cleaner, some furniture polish, and some clean rags she'd fashioned from old skivvy shirts of mine and moved to the big room.

I was emptying ash trays into the fireplace when I found one of her cigarettes on the hearth. The lipstick had faded to a pale pink stain at one end, and I knelt to pick it up, holding it at the ash end, as though I were a detective finding clues.

I remember going through the FBI building in Washington one summer and being shown a man that some of the sleuths constructed from a cigarette they'd found in a thief's hide-out.

I didn't even need the cigarette. I threw it into the fireplace, brushed my hands, and lighted one of my own, moving my hand until it found the shelf above the open pit, looking down at her butt.

I didn't need cigarettes to know her. I knew her all right. I knew what shade of lipstick she used and what brand of nail polish. I knew the shampoo she liked, the soap. I knew her bra size and slip size, her dress size, the sweaters she liked, her shoe size. I knew her ring size and what jewelry she favored. I knew her tastes in food, in drink, in books, in plays, in movies. I knew her insatiable love for red in her dress.

I knew her politics, her hopes, her vanities, her likes, dislikes. I knew just how she looked naked; cripes, I

scrubbed her back. I knew where the faint beginnings of hair started on her back, just above the hip line.

I knew that she liked to paint her toenails, and didn't only because I hated it. I knew when she wanted to have love made to her, and I knew, perhaps even better than she, when she might cringe if I touched her, and never after the first six months we were married had I put my hand to her breast or my lips to her ear when I wasn't welcomed.

She had an absolute passion for those terrible radio mysteries, and often, just to humor her, we'd turn off the lights, either in town or here, and lie together on the sofa, my arms around her while she shuddered and screamed in real terror at the antics of actors and the impossible situations.

She was hipped on presents. That pattern of gifts created by her parents I kept up infallibly after we were married. There were presents always for her birthday, our anniversary, the anniversary of the first day we met, Christmas and Easter and New Year's and Mother's Day and Father's Day and my birthday and Rosh Hashana and the Day of Atonement and what not?

The red terry-cloth robe was spread out on her bed a week ago when we drove out for our vacation. I'd come out after work the night before to get it ready. When she saw it she squealed and stamped her feet, jumping up and down, and ran to me with the robe. "You old Poppa," she said, holding me. "You old Poppa you. A present for Mary, my old Poppa bought me a present."

She needed flattery from me as she needed food. This

puzzled me always, for she had two completely doting parents, and yet she never tired of hearing me talk of her face and legs, her wit, her generosity, her charm, her beauty. I could interrupt a dinner, a movie, her bath, or even her beloved mysteries, to whisper how lovely she was and make her actually purr in delight.

"Joe," she said once, after some classmate of hers had left our apartment and I'd been complaining at the woman's surliness. "She's unhappy, Joe," Mary said. "I sometime want just to put my arms around every unhappy person I see and take them home. Is that all right, Joe?" staring wide-eyed at me. "Is it?" she asked, waiting for my nod.

She had a completely generous heart. I learned soon enough that she was always without money because she was always giving it away. Her home, from the time she was a child, was haven for cats and dogs and bums and neighborhood kids whom she fed and washed and dressed in her clothes. Her parents never knew who would sit down to dinner with them, and they never rebuked her for this, fearful lest they spoil her and soil the impulses which made her want to do things for people.

She detested shopping for clothes, yet she wanted fine garments, and she could buy a complete wardrobe, suit, hat, shoes, stockings, gloves, purse, in less time than most women would take to decide on a dish towel.

She would not write a letter, to anybody, and yet when the *News* sent me to Duluth on the longshoremen's strike there, I was bombarded with special deliveries and

telegrams and phone calls, singing wires and registered letters.

In the summer she spent most of the day in the water, and only by my agreeing to submit to scalp treatments for my hair (she had a horror of me becoming bald) would she promise not to swim across White Bear Lake.

She didn't know how to play bridge, in spite of the sorority, nor gin rummy, nor any rummy, nor casino, nor hearts, nor chess, nor checkers, nor dominoes, nor backgammon, and she played a completely ignorant game of poker, at which she insisted she was an expert, sitting through an evening always within reach of my chips and dipping regularly into my stack, losing almost gratefully and betraying by lips and eyes and hands and stamping of feet every card dealt her.

She was a fine cook and a better housekeeper, doing both with the zest and enjoyment that I got, for example, from my job, and she never tired of working, nor has she ever complained, although now we can afford a maid during the nine months we live in the city.

"Teach me handball," she said after a week in which I'd been three nights at the Y playing in a tournament.

"Girls can't play, Mar'," I said.

"Then I'm coming to watch," she insisted.

"Women aren't allowed."

"I'm no woman. I'm your girl. Do you play naked?" She looked at me. "Well, then all right, I'm coming." She did, and soon other fellows brought their girls and their wives.

So it was with the fights, though she had never seen

one until she knew me, and she would come with me faithfully to all parts of Minneapolis and St. Paul, sitting in smoke-filled windowless halls to watch terrible amateurs through an evening of bad boxing.

"It's my duty," she said, although she soon became a fan. "My wifely duty," she said.

"We're not married," I protested.

"We will be, you old goat," she'd say. "You're not getting away from me. I'll have you on the Mann Act, don't forget that night in Wisconsin."

She had been, for most of her life, an only child. She was the second born; the Simpsons had a son who was killed by a truck on Snelling Avenue when he was three, while Mrs. Simpson lay in labor at Miller Hospital.

Mary told me about it. Ken, the boy, had been left with the maid while Mr. Simpson took his wife to the hospital. The maid had taken the child for a walk, and in that block between Summit and Portland he had suddenly eluded the maid, darted into the street, and been slammed back against the sidewalk to his death by a north-bound coal truck. The driver had not even seen the child and was unaware he had hit the boy until he read of it in the newspapers that evening.

Mrs. Simpson was not told until she was ready to leave the hospital, where her doctors had kept her on one pretext and another for three weeks, warning her that Ken was ill with a cold and she must be completely well before leaving her bed.

The old boy was all for adopting a son, but Mrs. Simpson would have none of it, nor, she told Mary years

later, did she ever want another child. Mary became a problem to them, for they were now aware of the dangers before them, rearing an only child, and from maybe the day when she was able to walk they never forgot for a moment that she must not be spoiled.

Fortunately the neighborhood was full of children Mary's age, their parents in approximately the same income brackets as the Simpsons, and the little girl was encouraged always to bring her playmates home.

While they had employed a maid for Ken, Mrs. Simpson wanted to devote her time to Mary, and she did, being careful always not to indulge the child.

Mary went through an elementary school in the neighborhood, and her parents, after much talk, decided on Central High for her, instead of one of the private schools in the city.

She was sent to a YWCA camp instead of the more exclusive camps near Brainerd for that same reason, and she joined the Campfire Girls as well as the young ladies' group sponsored at Sunrise Ridge.

When she was fifteen, her father's jewelry business dived almost into receivership. The firm her grandfather had founded was for years the authorized repair shop and purchase place for watches by all employees of the Great Northern Railroad. Then suddenly railroad ownership switched from St. Paul to New York and Simpson was out.

His income was probably reduced to around ten thousand dollars a year, but it wasn't evident in their living habits. Mary got a roadster for her high-school graduation

and a sheared-beaver coat two years later. Simpson kept his memberships at Sunrise Ridge and the Yacht Club, but there were no trips to New York and Florida and California, and Mary, who had always overdrawn her allowance two days after she received it, was broke a great part of the time.

She was an extremely popular girl through high school and college, getting more than her share of dates without forming any serious attachments. There was one guy, Hal Thorne. I saw him around town. He was working in a brokerage house and going to the St. Paul College of Law at night. She'd spent a lot of time with him after she graduated, but that had broken off almost mutually.

Then after she graduated she discovered that most of the men she dated bored her. She was twenty-one, had gone to work for the Wilder Charities as a social worker for ninety dollars a month, and while she had no great love for the work, she liked the people she had to see and she could not bear to sit idle.

She had thought frequently of leaving the city, moving to Chicago or New York, for most of her girl friends had married; but she was extremely fond of her parents, and they of her, and she confessed to me that the idea of living alone in a strange town terrified her.

She had no inhibitions about sex. Her parents had been frank with her, and the old boy had told her when she was seventeen that while he hated to think of her going to bed with anyone, the possibility surely existed, and that if she did to please use precautions and if she should find herself either pregnant or (he was frank right down

the line) diseased, for Christ's sake to tell him immediately. She promised and there was never anything said about it again.

She'd gone to bed with Hal Thorne, and not because of any great love for him. Remember this was an extremely handsome girl, and a healthy person. She'd kissed boys when she was sixteen, and petted when she was eighteen. She was as aware of her body as a healthy girl can be, and while her mother had counseled against sex, there had never been those horrible tales of consequences with which Jewish mothers hope to frighten their daughters from the bed.

Thorne came along just when she was about ready to be had. He was a good-looking fellow, and in two weeks he had her out at the Yacht Club. She was terrified for a week, and then that passed, and for three months he was there.

I've hated him since she told me.

There was another fellow from Houston, Texas, who was visiting in town the Christmas before I met her. She spent one night with him.

Then for a year nobody attracted her and she fell into a routine of work and swimming and more and more time with her family.

She had no attachments, she could find no new interests, and except for a few girl friends and an occasional date, she was alone a good part of the time.

She golfed with her mother and on Sundays with her father. The three became closer than at any time since

Mary had been a child, but the Simpsons could not help wondering—and aloud—when she would meet someone she liked.

These reminders brought on the only hard words she'd ever spoken to her parents, and after an outburst there would be three or four days when Mary would call from the Loop that she would not be home for dinner and then eat alone and see a movie or go for a long ride in the roadster.

She took to walking with her father or alone, and more and more she refused to talk of her life or her daily plans with her parents, and they, knowing it was a difficult time for her, never questioned anything she did.

Nor for a long time did they question her association with me.

I've been through a few sieges of "shiva," the seven-day period of mourning during which the wife, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of the deceased sit on low stools in the living room in their stockings, the men unable by religious law to shave, and the women without make-up. My grandmother died when I was about ten and an uncle a few years later, and while I

wasn't compelled to "sit shiva," as the phrase is used, still I was party to the goings on.

When we lived on the West Side there was a butcher named Nudelman, a bortsch-circuit-caliber cantor, who sold meat all through the year and occupied the pulpit in one of the uptown synagogues during the High Holidays. He was a very religious guy, always wearing a skullcap in the shop, and sharply aware of the indignity he suffered here in America, being forced to cut meat for a living instead of drawing a good wage as a cantor. The truth was he didn't have the stuff for the year-round job, but nobody was going to tell him that.

He had a son Manuel, fellow maybe six or seven years older than I, who was at the university when I was in junior high. He was a top engineering student, Nudelman's oldest, and the old man's pride. I knew him because I went to the shop a lot for my ma and he would deliver after classes for the old man. Besides, when he could sneak away for an hour he'd come up to the Roosevelt school grounds and play touch football or softball with us.

That neighborhood was saturated with Jews, and one day, it was in fall, when I got to the school grounds, the guys were absolutely breathless with excitement.

Manuel had married a Gentile, was living with her parents in Minneapolis, and they were going to put him through school.

I couldn't have been more than sixteen years old, but to me, then, it was maybe even more shocking than the atrocity stories from Germany that were just beginning to drift into the country.

The story was absolutely incredible, and we hurried immediately to the butcher shop, a block away, walking past the windows in pairs. The shop was closed, although this was Thursday afternoon when housewives bought their Sabbath fish and chickens. Something was up all right.

We played ball for the rest of the afternoon, and when I got home I found Ma sitting completely dejected in the kitchen, her supper made, but she absolutely listless.

"Ma," I said. "You hear something about Manny Nudelman?"

"He should burn up," she said, but there was no fire in her voice. "Wherever he is with that whore, he should burn up and her with him."

"What happened?" I asked.

"He isn't worth," she said. "Better he should kill the Ma and Pa than what he did, the murderer."

It was true all right. He had become, to me, as fascinating a character as Capone, or Max Schmeling, or Donald Henderson Clarke. I got the shivers thinking of what he'd done, putting myself in his place in spite of my fears at the thought, and shuddering at what would happen to me.

I thought of him as a romantic thief, as a lawbreaker, as colorful say as Basil Zaharoff. I washed up, found a book, and settled in the living room until Pa came home. He knew all about it and silenced Ma, saying there was no sense to talk until after supper.

It was a silent meal. Phil and I were quiet, more out of fear than anything, and afterward Phil went to band prac-

tice and I helped Ma with the dishes. The old man read the papers and then came into the kitchen, his belt loose and he rubbing his chin.

"I need a shave?" he asked.

"No," she said, as though she'd known all along what would happen. "You can go like that."

"Me too," I said. "I want to go."

"Stay," Ma yelled, but the old man cut in.

"No, if he wants to come, let him go. Let him see what a child does to parents. Go wash, Joe."

"I'm clean."

"Nu," he said, "sweep the floor, Ma will dress."

The Nudelmans lived in the bottom half of a duplex they owned on Clinton Avenue. There were several cars in front of the house when we got there, and the place was bright with lights. "Joe, you didn't bring a cap," the old man said.

"I got," Ma said. "What does he remember?" She took a skullcap from her purse and pushed it on my head.

We entered quietly without ringing, as is the custom, and with no hellos, as is the law. Nudelman was sitting before the front windows on a footstool, wearing black stockings and black pants, his white shirt open at the neck. His face was white, his lips dry and chapped.

His wife was a tiny woman, sitting with her two young daughters on a pair of upturned empty orange crates, they also in stockings. There were maybe thirty people in that room, all of them clucking and wearing the mournful faces of commiseration.

We found places against the wall, the old man holding my hand, and he and Ma began talking in whispers with people they knew.

They were all full of sympathy, all these people, parents of the kids I went to school with and played with.

And I knew something: this was out of line, this shiva I was witnessing. I'd gone to Hebrew school very little, but I knew this: shiva is prescribed only for death and conversion to another faith. Only on those two occasions.

Nudelman was sitting staring into space, then suddenly his wife began sobbing loudly and the girls put their arms about her to comfort her. He looked up and his face got color then all right, he was burning with anger. "Stop that crying for him!" he shouted, still sitting. "Don't cry for him, there is no son!" he shouted. He looked up at all of us there.

"I have no son!" he shouted. "My son is dead!" he shouted. "My son is gone!" he shouted. He beat his chest slowly and rhythmically with one fist. "I have no son!" he shouted. "Gone, my son! In hell, my son! To the goyim, my son! Dead, my son!" he shouted.

His wife moaned loudly, and the women, Ma too, joined her, some of them crying and others sobbing with her. "Oy!" his wife wailed. "Oy!" she wailed. "Oy, oy, oy, oy, oy!" She held her fists to her ears and rocked her head. "Oy, oy, oy, oy!" she wailed.

"Stop, he isn't worth!" Nudelman shouted. "He isn't worth! Dead, my son!" he shouted. "My son is dead, the devil has my son! My son is in hell! I have no son!" he shouted.

W e met in June and by the tail end of September she'd been asking to meet my parents for a month. What was I to tell her? Certainly not the truth; I'd resolved not to hurt her with that. I said they were old-fashioned, that they would have to get used to the idea, that it would take them a little time.

I'd worked a Tuesday for a guy on the desk and taken this Sunday off. We were having dinner out near Anoka and she was talking again about my family.

"Joe, I don't understand," she complained.

"Baby"—I was very earnest—"it's just one of those things. They'll have to understand you."

She looked across the table at me. "Joe, do they know about me?"

"What are you talking about?"

I watched her as she looked down at her ice cream, the ribbon in her hair shining from the ceiling lights. I wanted to reach out and touch it and her ears from which the bead earrings hung.

"You never talk about them," she complained.

"Cripes, what is there to talk about?"

"Joe."

"Well, what *is* there to talk about? They're just two people with funny ideas." We weren't in the talking-mar-

riage stage yet. I don't know how she felt then, but I was walking a pencil-thick wire.

"All right, Joe." She played with her ice cream, making indentations in the mound with her fork.

"Well, don't be mad." Didn't I know this was going to happen? Did I have holes in my head that I had to take up with this woman? It was time for out. One thing, thank God, there'd been no bed. I could check out a gentleman anyway.

"Eat your dessert, darling," she said. "We have to be in town by eight-thirty for the Pop Concert." I had a pair of passes for the show, an institution unique in St. Paul, where part of the Minneapolis Symphony and a host of figure skaters put on an evening at the Auditorium three nights a week during the summer.

"You're not eating yours," I complained.

She smiled at me. "I'm not hungry anymore, dear." Now I was ruining her appetite. I watched her work with lipstick and rouge, thinking as always how superfluous those things were to her beauty.

We drove into town silently. I knew now that it was time for me to quit. Too many questions now. I had to get out now. Since June I'd been telling myself this was just a party, I'd check after the going got tough, and it was beginning to get tough enough.

I don't know where a man summons that vanity which assures him he can forget a woman overnight. I was sure full of it then, and for many months beyond. This woman had no hold on me. I'd just check out in a week or two, that's all.

The Auditorium fronts on Fourth Street, which narrows in that block until a trolley passing the building fills the street. We parked before the library a block beyond and walked slowly toward the Auditorium in a swirl of humanity that would soon fill the twelve-thousand seats in the arena.

Mary held my arm, grown cheerful again. "Joe, promise you'll take me skating in the winter," she said.

"Ha. Can you skate?"

"Best skater at Macalester when I was fifteen," she boasted.

"I'll skate your ears off, you crow," I smiled.

"My ears off! Joey, I don't skate on my ears."

"You could, they're so big."

"Joe."

I bent to nip the lobe. "You've got the loveliest ears in Christendom," I said solemnly.

"Have I?"

"Absolute." I got her hand, brought it up until I held it near my chest. "The loveliest ears and the loveliest nose and the loveliest eyes and the loveliest arms and the loveliest—" I looked down at her. She took my hand, brought it to her lips, kissed each finger. We were under the half-block-long marquee now, all the lights burning, and a thousand people milling around, and then down at the far entrance I saw my pa holding my ma's arm, both of them pushing through the crowd to get to the general admittance door.

I felt as though steel doors had clanged shut behind

me and I had to push and shove and kick with my feet to get out before they were locked.

"Mar'," I said. "Mary, listen, let's not go." I'd stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, holding her there with me.

"What?"

"Mary, listen." I turned so I was holding her arms, looking straight at her.

"Joe!" She was frightened once more.

At least I had my back to them. "Mary, the publisher is going to be there tonight. He doesn't like this pass business."

"Well, then, we'll buy tickets," she decided.

"No, Mar', no. We'll see a movie. Come on, dear. We'll go Wednesday, you don't care, do you? We can go Wednesday." I turned her so that we both faced the library. "I don't want to go tonight," I said. "Holy smokes, do we have to argue about that?"

She walked almost to the corner with me, then stopped. "Joe, what is it?"

"Nothing." I wondered if they'd seen me.

"Joe, something is wrong. What is it, darling?"

"Nothing. Holy smokes. Nothing."

"Joe, you can't say that to me." Our voices were low, and people stopped to turn and glance at us. I took her arm and she walked with me until we were in front of the library, her roadster a few feet off.

"Joe." I saw her face and I knew she'd guessed the reason. I heard the tumblers fall into place in the steel door.

"Who was there, Joe?" she demanded.

"Nobody."

We were quite alone on the street now, a few vags sitting out of hearing in Rice Park across the way. "Your parents, Joe," she said. "You saw your parents."

"No."

"Joe, you did." I had never seen her look that way. Her eyes seemed to open more and her nostrils flared, honest they did. "Joe, you did," she said, "and you were afraid. You're ashamed of me, you're ashamed of me."

"Mary, no."

"You are. You're ashamed of me, you dirty sonofabitch." I wanted to put my arms around her. "You're ashamed of me, you dirty, sneaking, lying bastard, you. Why, you're nothing but a cheap, conniving, scheming—" She searched for words. "You're nothing but cheap. You bastard, you bastard, you bastard, you!"

"Mary!"

"Get your hands off me." She jerked her shoulder. "Get your filthy hands off me. Ashamed of me, aren't you? I'm not good enough for you, am I?" She shuddered. "My God, what have I gotten into? What kind of horrible, dirty, filth have I crawled into?" She backed up, pulling the skirt from her behind, me following. "Get away from me. Get away from me, you sonofabitch, you sonofabitch you. You dirty sonofabitch, get away, you dirty, rotten—" Then she turned, running for her car, and I stood there wanting to die.

She flooded the motor, trying to start the thing, but I didn't move. The car was still for a minute, but I didn't move. She had to shift gears ten times, moving inches

each way, before she got out, but I didn't move. I watched her taillight until it was out of sight, and then I walked across the street and sat down on a bench.

I felt as though a hundred baths wouldn't cleanse me, but at least that was enough. I was out of it, thank God for that.

Remembering all this now, with her gone, made me as angry as I had been those first few days after she left me standing before the library. I set the vacuum cleaner against an end table, the polish and the rags on the floor beside it, wanting suddenly to get out of this place which made me feel as though I were alone in the night in an empty theater, the chairs down and the screen a ghostly gray.

She shouldn't have left me, damn it, not then and not this morning. If she married me, then she married me all the way. How I thought and how I acted was thrown in; she took the basket, like the grab bags grocers sold you when you were a kid.

I walked out on the porch to latch the screen door, then unlatched it, thinking she might return, but hating her nevertheless. I went through the big room and the kitchen

and sat down on the back stoop, the sun full on my face. I moved my head back until it rested on the two-by-four rail for the steps and stretched my legs across the stoop.

Let her stay away. Once and for all let her stay away. Her and her ultimatums she was always confronting me with. We had a life here. There was nothing wrong with it.

I wasn't a chippy who played other women. I hadn't been out of line in seven years, and that's the Christ's truth. I hadn't been drunk without her drunk beside me since I'd known her. I wasn't cheap. I couldn't wait for payday to buy her things; not a store I didn't see something for her on a counter, not a specialty shop I could pass without seeing her carrying that bag and the other gloves, and the slips and the negligees.

She'd given up her friends. Ha! How about me? Did we ever see any of the guys I'd chummed with? I'd cut them all off the list for her. So it was my doing; she'd always say that she wanted to meet them. Sure, she did. She couldn't know how those women would needle her, oh, ever so gently, but they'd get their lumps in all right. I just didn't want to have anything to do with them, that's all.

What the hell did I want with her friends? What were they but a bunch of hypocrites hating my guts but tolerating me for her. I didn't need them and I didn't need my pals either. I didn't need anybody but her, and if that wasn't enough for my wife, then let her stay away.

She could stay away now as she had that time she left me standing before the library. I hadn't sent for her then and I wouldn't send for her now.

I'd gotten by that first time and I'd get by now. I know this: you don't break with a woman by kissing her good-by and pressing her hand and wishing her luck. You don't get rid of a woman being gallant; she'll haunt you until time's end that way. You must find some peg to hang your heart on, drive love from your mind, and look for hate to help you stay away.

When she left me at the library I went home to an almost sleepless night. I had a date a half hour after I got to work Monday and a room at the Gopher Hotel five minutes after I told the talent she was going to have supper with me.

Bill Bird found enough mistakes in my copy that night to amble back to my desk. He wore the eyeshade, the only man in the city room who did, and he had his chin lifted so the smoke of his cigarette would stay out of his eyes. "You got eight thumbs tonight, Joe," he said.

"I'm sorry, Bill."

He raised one foot and let it down on my desk. Then he leaned over, resting his elbow on his knee. "None of my business," he said, "but is there anything I can do?"

"I'm all right." I wanted to talk with him.

He tapped the ash of his cigarette, then returned it to his lips. "Trouble with Mary?" he asked. He could ask it, this guy had raised me from a pup on the *News*.

"No trouble."

He let his foot down easy. "Oh," he said and turned.

"We're through," I said.

He moved his head so he was looking at me. "You know what you're doing," he said.

"I know what I'm doing."

"Well, just so you know what you're doing," he said.

"I know what I'm doing and I'm doing right. To hell with her and the day I saw her."

He pointed his eyeshade at me. "Joe, never call a woman names so somebody can hear you," he warned. "You may want to forget you said that."

"Ah, the hell with it. I'll get laid tonight and forget the whole thing."

"Sure you will," he said and walked back to his desk.

He was a wise guy too. Knew all the answers, that Bill Bird. Real smart guy. I sat out the night back there at my desk, not even going out to eat. I passed the cribbage game and when the papers came up didn't look at them.

At midnight I got my jacket, waved at Bill and the rest of the desk, and left.

I'll be honest all the way. Sure I looked to see if her roadster was waiting on Fourth Street. I even looked on Minnesota and up on Cedar as I walked to the hotel and my date.

Jerry Simonet had been married when she was seventeen, divorced three years later. Her daughter stayed with Jerry's mother, and once in a while Jerry stayed there too. She was a dirty blonde who lived for clothes and to be seen in that part of St. Paul's café society made up of saloon workers, detectives, gamblers, the rich young men and the rich old men single or divorced or separated from their wives.

She wasn't the easiest woman in the world to get in bed, but if you were known around town it wasn't too

hard. We'd had a six-week tryst three years ago, and since then she either called me three or four times a year or I called her.

She was sitting in the lobby smoking, dressed to the teeth and looking at the field as they looked at her. I came up behind her and kissed the top of her head. She reached over to hold my wrist. "Hello, dream boat," she said.

I came around the chair, lifting her as I moved. "Jerry, this can't go on. You've got to come away with me."

"I need a toothbrush."

"Toothbrush," I snorted. I put her arm in mine and steered her to the grill. Let some of Mary's friends see me. Let them tell her how I worried whether or not I ever saw her again. "You don't need a toothbrush, dearie. You can level with me. Take them out. We'll buy a glass."

She roared at that. I was the funniest guy in the world. I just killed her. I found two stools at the bar and ordered us some scotch. I took my own time looking the place over. She wasn't there.

When I drink, three scotches and I have trouble talking. The bar closed at one, and fifteen minutes before I was floating, talking with Jerry, answering her questions, being a gay young man, and in my head wondering what I was going to do without Mary.

Jerry can drink all night and all day and the next night. When the lights dimmed she said: "Let's get a bottle, Joey, and get looped good. I feel like it."

I kissed her hand. "I feel like it too, dear." I *couldn't* call her baby or angel or darling. "Come on with me."

"Can we get liquor up there, Joe?" She was using lipstick.

"All you want. Come on, sugar, we'll beat our heads in."

She squeezed my arm. "Come on, beat my head in, Joey."

"I'll make you happy, sugar." She squeezed my fingers as we went out into the lobby and brushed against my thighs as we passed the desk. I got the nod from Al Thompson, the desk clerk, telling me with his eyes that the key was on the bureau and the door open. I suddenly got wild with excitement and wanted to carry her upstairs.

We were alone in the elevator. We stood with our backs to the wall, our hands playing with each other, and I felt her nails in my palm, scratching gently, her fingers warm and inviting.

I put my arm around her as the elevator door closed behind us, and we walked slowly down the hall, rubbing against one another, both of us silent. Still holding her, I pushed the door open and then, just as we stepped inside, shoved it closed with my foot, moved behind her, and put my arms around her, my hands cupping her breasts. She let her head rest on my shoulder and I kissed her neck and ears and chin. Her hands moved until they were over mine, pressing against mine, and she shivered a little.

"Come on, Joe," she whispered.

"Yes." I knew then I didn't belong here.

"Come on, Joe. Let's go, Joe." I could feel her body moving and I was thinking of how I could get out of here. I felt like such a traitor, as though I were cheating.

She turned in my arms, kicking her shoes off, so that she became smaller when she faced me. Her hands stole inside my coat, stopping in the small of my back, pressing me to her. "Come on, Joe," she whispered, her lips in my ear. I could see her face as my eyes became accustomed to the light. "Get your clothes off, honey," she said. She couldn't stop moving as I held her. "Take them all off, Joe," she whispered.

"Yes." Mary was suddenly in the room.

Jerry put her lips in my neck, nibbling at the skin, and then she broke away and I could see her near the bed, getting out of her clothes, letting her dress and bra and panties drop on the floor, lifting one leg and then the other to get her stockings off. I wanted to get out of the room and run from her.

It seemed that I was doing a great wrong being here with this woman with whom I'd slept so many times. For Mary was watching us. She could see me here, and I couldn't do anything with her in the room.

Jerry pulled the covers from the bed, lay down, bunching the two pillows behind her. "Joe," she whispered. "Gee, Joe, hurry, honey, hurry for Jerry."

I didn't even take my jacket off. I had to tell her something. I walked over to the bed, sat down beside her. She took my hand, kissed the fingers and my wrist and the elbow, her tongue busy and warm, pushing the sleeve back until my bicep ached. She twisted until her face was touching mine, her arm about my neck, her tongue licking the lobe of my ear, and then I jerked away, moving down to the foot of the bed, and suddenly, without warn-

ing, unable to stop, I began to sob. My whole body shook with sobbing. I put my face in my hands, lowered my head, trying to hide from Jerry. I felt the covers moving as she pulled them over her, for she was ashamed of her body now, but still I couldn't stop.

"Joe?" She was afraid. "Joe, you all right? Joe? You're not dosed, are you, honey?"

I ran into the bathroom, closing the door, and sat on the stool until the tears stopped. I took off my jacket and my shirt and washed my face with cold water, seeing myself red-eyed in the mirror. Oh, Mary, I thought. Jesus Christ, Mary, where are you? Oh, Mary, what am I going to do? Holy smokes, baby, what am I going to do now?

I got two drags of a cigarette before I trusted myself to come out. She was smoking, the reading lamp lit above her, the covers pulled tight up to her neck. "You all right, Joe?" she asked. She was worried.

"Crying jag. I'm sorry, Jerry."

"You don't want to——"

"No, dear. I'm sorry."

"Sorry, hell. I get 'em myself." She turned, resting her head on her arm. "You paid for the room, didn't you, honey?"

"Sure, dear. You keep it. Night."

Al Thompson saw me go out, but he said nothing.

I remember it was five-thirty when I last looked at my wrist watch that night. I slept until almost that time the next afternoon. I was slow shaving and bathing. Then

sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee, I listened to Ma telling me her troubles with the laundryman, the butcher, the landlord, the old man, Phil's wife and her heart. She asked if I'd be home for supper, but I told her that I was going to the Y for some handball.

I got a trolley downtown to the Y and then, just as I got to the building, turned from it and went into a movie. I sat in the dark, almost empty theater. It was around seven o'clock, and I tried to figure what I would do. I couldn't call her, I knew what that would lead to, and yet how to stop this ruthless gnawing at my insides? My stomach quivered, and neither the coffee at home nor at the drugstore a few minutes back had stopped the feeling of breathlessness I had as though now, immediately, this next instant, was bringing some great event before me.

I didn't know what to do. There was nobody to see, I had no heart for drinking. I'd learned last night that the answer was not with women. Just now, sitting in the theater, I didn't want to talk, tell my troubles to anybody.

I could call her, sure. But that meant I would never be free, that I was then committed after these few months to a continuing subterfuge, lies, cheating, hiding, and I didn't want that either.

I could get a job on any newspaper in the country. I knew that. I was a good rewrite man. I could go away. I could leave tomorrow, that was my day off too, just get a train and leave. I could go to Los Angeles or San Francisco, those were good towns, or to Denver and work on the *Post*, or to Kansas City and get a job on the *Star*. I

could go to New Orleans, I'd always liked the sound of the *Times-Picayune*, or Chicago, that was supposed to be the best newspaper town of all, and work on the *News* there, or the *Herald-American*, or the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Ed Meyers had gone out there to work, he'd get me a job.

I sat in the theater for maybe two hours, not seeing a thing on the screen but seeing myself alone in one of those towns, and, living alone, dedicated to my lost love. I would write a book and inscribe it to her, and wherever she was, she'd know it was her book. She'd be married and have kids, but she would never forget. I'd go overseas as a foreign correspondent, and one day in Paris, sitting alone as always at an outdoor café, she'd walk past. Her husband had died. She was gray and I was gray, her kids married, and she in France to forget her husband's death, and I would stand up and say hello, Mary. She would say hello, Joe, and sit down and I would order two drinks and— Mickey Mouse darted onto the screen and suddenly even the dreaming was no good.

I went into the hot-dog shop on St. Peter Street and gulped three of them down with a bottle of beer. It was only nine o'clock.

What in the name of God was I going to do?

My belligerence had gone, my resolutions, my promises to stay away, my thanks that finally we were through with this association and I was out of it.

I walked up toward the cathedral and Summit Avenue, sorry now that I had slept so late, for there was no bed possible for hours. I walked slowly up Summit Avenue,

turning at every car that passed me going either out in the city or down toward the Loop. I knew where I was going all right, I wasn't fooling myself there. Maybe she'd be walking, maybe driving, somehow accidentally we'd run into each other. It wasn't a question of saving face, hell with face; maybe in my head I had it figured that meeting thus would be all right.

I had never felt so completely alone. There was nothing else in my thinking but that girl. I had dismissed completely my life before I met her and any sort of life now without her in it. I didn't know what was going to happen to me, that's all.

Those men who had somehow managed to salvage some life and respectability without the women they should have married were regarded as martyrs in the Jewish community. They had survived tragedy and they were always spoken of with respect and implicit pity, as though they had come through tuberculosis or tremendous physical setbacks.

Tonight it held no comfort for me. This was so new for me, I had never experienced anything like it, and at that moment, walking steadily toward Snelling Avenue, I was beside myself with wanting her with me, and wallowing in pity for myself. I knew it and I couldn't stop it.

I had heard of men haunting the homes of their women, but had always sneered at such capers. What sense was there in it? I was finding out now, all right. There was no sense except try and stay away. I turned down Snelling for the block to her street, crossing the avenue so I'd

have that much space between me and her home. I didn't know what to expect, but I *had* to see the house.

I saw it. There was one light burning, in what probably was the master bedroom upstairs. The rest of the house was dark, the porch visible from the street light. I walked down to the end of the block, then turned and came up on the same side past the house again. If there had been a light burning in her bedroom, all right, I would have gone home, but now I *knew* she was out, and in my mind I could conjure up the most horrible places where she might be, always with another man. I walked slowly up and down the block for an hour, and then, unable any longer to hold myself, I went halfway down Snelling to the alley, darted into the semidarkness of the small path, and almost ran down to her garage.

Her car was in there next to the old boy's sedan.

I double-checked. The garage was unlocked and I stole in, touched the hood. It was cold. I lifted the hood. The motor was cold. The car hadn't been used in hours.

That should have satisfied me, shouldn't it? I sat on the steps of the house across the street until almost four o'clock, until the night's chill wrapped me and held me shivering and even my cigarette failed to warm me.

I stopped in a coffeepot and two cups would not chase the chill.

Yet the next day there was a little glow of victory in me. I had stayed away two days. I had not been weak, and while I wanted to talk with somebody, to tell them of my triumph, I didn't leave the house Wednesday. I read, or tried to, and sat talking with my ma, and then

after supper, when I had stretched out on the bed in my room, the old man came in, taking the covers off Phil's bed, empty now that he was married and gone, and started telling me stories.

I don't know yet whether he suspected anything that time, but he was so warm, so full of cheer and good will, that I almost forgot her for those few hours.

Then Ma called us into the kitchen for coffee and just-baked bread and strawberry preserves, the old man eating the latter with a spoon, forgetting the bread. I had been raised in this kind of family relationship, and it was so pleasant with the two of them there, Ma cheerful for once, that I ate until there was no room in me for more and got to bed.

That's where it started again, lying there in the darkness with nobody around. There is where you get it always, alone in the bed, the lights down and the house still so that you feel a little like a traitor looking into nothing.

I had a game I played just before going to sleep. I'd be a handball champ, whipping the current winner in the city, or a Pulitzer Prize winner, or a top-ranking novelist, all the things I knew I'd never become.

But these had faded now and become for me absolutely unbelievable, so that there was nothing to keep her out of my head.

I called in sick on Thursday and fooled my ma into thinking I was. I lay in bed all through the afternoon and evening, unable to do anything or think of anything but her. I had reached the point where it was an effort to keep from running to the phone, and then, about eight

that evening, I dialed her number, my hand over the mouthpiece, and listened while her father said hello ten times and then hung up, feeling such shame for having done it that I hurried to the living room, talking with the old man about anything that came to mind, almost manic in my eagerness to drive her from my head.

I knew this: I had to get back to work, but I didn't want to go near that paper. As long as I was home, the doors shut, then nothing could touch me, not this horrible thing I'd fallen party to, or Bill Bird's tongue, or the knowing glances of the rest of the staff, or the people around town who had seen us together. Even if the family found out about her, then so long as I was home it made little difference, I was safe.

Friday about noon Bill Bird called and I knew the party was over, I'd have to come to work. I knew it because he knew I was faking and because I needed the job. I wasn't leaving town, you see, I was staying right here, and the old man's grocery business was all I faced if I quit the *News*.

Bill kept me busy. I wrote a city council story, then an involved, dull piece on some personnel changes in the archdiocese that always have to be checked for the priests' ratings with the chancery. Bill asked for a feature on Hamline University. About ten o'clock there was coffee and a sandwich at my elbow; his work.

Just before midnight he called me up to the desk. "Joint in Minneapolis owes me two steaks," he said.

"I'm tired, Bill."

"Steaks, Joe."

"Bill, thanks."

"All right, kid, don't be mad," he said.

"Bill, honest to Christ, I'm not mad. I just feel like such a jerk saying no to you, but—well, I'll just take it easy."

"Go on home," he said kindly. You've earned your keep."

"I don't mind hanging around." I wanted out fast.

"Go on home," he repeated. "I'll pick you up on my way down tomorrow."

"All right, thanks," I said. I was tired too. There was no poop in me from the week past and I just wanted to lie down. Maybe I'd take the old man's car and go for a drive. Past her house, eh, Joe? I asked myself.

The damned elevator was on the blink. I walked down, wondering how long this would last, when I would wake in the morning to welcome the sun, when the breathlessness would leave my stomach, and when I would want to see people again and be with people once more.

Her roadster was parked a few feet up from the door of the *News*.

The tension flowed out of me as though a petcock had been opened. I remember my eyes dimmed and there was such a warmth through me, such a singing and lilt in me as I had never felt before. I smiled to myself there in the doorway, felt for cigarettes and lit one before I walked to the car.

She wore an old red suède raincoat, sitting with her back to the window, smoking too, one leg across the seat. Oh, she was lovely. She was beautiful. She was angelic and I loved her so, now and forever.

It seemed at once that I hadn't seen her for years and that I had just left her a moment to run up to the office. Everything was so right now, the pieces seemed to have fallen in place, and I was hungry and thirsty and awake and never wanting to sleep. I climbed in and closed the door behind me. I wanted to touch her, but I sat with my hands on my legs, my left leg slung across the seat so that our knees touched.

"Hello, Joe," she said.

"Hello, darling," I said.

"You didn't call me."

"No."

"You called once," she said.

"Yeah."

"Daddy answered." She laughed. It was the laugh of a mother whose child has been choking on an apricot pit and has just been freed of it.

"Foolish," I said. I wanted to touch her.

Her eyes filled. "No, Joe, no."

"All right, darling," I said. I found her fingers and we clung to each other almost desperately, trying to crawl into each other's hands with our fingers.

Then I took her other hand and leaned over, our knees still touching, and kissed her cheek and then kissed her lips, and such a feeling of peace came over me as I had never felt, as though this were home and now there was no other place to look, I had come to the end of the road.

"Joe," she said. "Oh, Joe, what are we going to do?"

I didn't care tonight. "I don't know."

"Oh, Joe," she said. "I love you so, darling. I'm just not

me any more, don't you know that? I'm you and in you, and you're in me, and I'm not anything without you."

"I love you, Mary. I've never said it and I knew it all the time, but I was afraid. Like I wanted to be sure." I kissed her again. "I love you, Mary, and always you and never any other for good and ever."

"Joe, what will we do?"

"I don't know, Mary. I don't know. I'll go away."

"Joe!" She almost screamed my name. "Joe, no! Oh, Joe, never, please, oh, never!"

"Shah, baby. Shah. Shah." My mother said that to me when I was sick as a kid.

"No. Darling, you can't," she said. "Joe, you can't." She moved her leg and put her head down on my shoulder. I held her thus, stroking her hair. "Joe, you can't go away. Oh, darling, darling, never, Joe. You can't leave me." She kissed my nose and eyes and lips and ears almost in a frenzy. She pressed herself against me and held me close. "You can't, darling, I'll die. Joey, I'd die without you, darling, you can't."

I could feel her against me now and I hadn't wanted that. I loved her, and that made it different for me, and in some fashion I had thought that as long as there wasn't the final union I was still a gentleman and had done nothing wrong, but now I knew.

"Mary?"

"Yes, darling."

"Mar', let's go."

"Yes, darling."

"I mean—Mary, you know what I mean?"

"Yes, darling." She held me. "Of course, darling."

"You want to?" She seemed to find holes in me that she could fill with her body.

"Since the festival, Joe. I almost couldn't wait, I was going to ask you."

"I'll drive," I said.

She took my face between her hands and looked long at me and then kissed me with such a passion as I had never experienced and that even now, to this day, has never lessened. Somehow, without either of us getting out of the car, we switched places so that I was behind the wheel, and I started the roadster and drove off to the cabins near Mendota, with her hand high on my thigh and her lips in my neck.

Then was the time I could have quit really. If I had sent her off, told her to stay on her street, walked away, she wouldn't have bothered me. She might have called once or twice, and I need only have hung up. Up until that night I could have checked out. When I carried her to the porch of her house in the cold dawn the next morning, I should have known I was stuck. I knew it this way: When I was with Mary, during those

hours when I saw her and touched her and looked at her, I was completely in love. Then I would walk or drive away from her house and later, in my bed, hearing the old man's snores in the next room, I'd know I couldn't let it go on and fall asleep secure in my mind. When it got too warm, I'd check out.

I was boss then too. She'd come back, not me, and implicit between us now was the knowledge that there was a difference, an abnormality between us. She didn't know yet what it was, nor how or where the ramifications would lead. The screw was just beginning to turn on her.

Maybe a month after that the publisher offered his annual two-day dinner and stag for the news room and the composing room, the printers. He always gave a good spread; there were few speeches and enough poker games to please all the gamblers as well as two crap games. Bill and I worked the first night and went together the second night, when the other guys got the paper out.

Me, I'm a craps gambler. I haven't got any more to lose than the next guy, but I like fast action and if I'm lucky I want to make a pile. This was a head-on game, nobody was banking it, and all the action was in the center or on some betting around the table.

There were maybe thirty or forty men circling the game when Bill Bird and I got there. The printers then made more money than reporters and they were after the dice, each with his wad of green in his left hand and a cigar or cigarette in the right.

Bill Bird never gambles. He says that anybody raised in Montana has seen too many guys dying broke, and

with him it's like a drunk with booze. He has to stay away altogether, he can't quit when he starts.

Most of the city-room guys were in the poker games, and besides me there was a sports writer and the publisher in the crap game.

The dice were two men to my left going clockwise when I found a spot, and I watched them, trying to see if they were right for the shooter or not as they moved slowly around the table. I had twenty bucks and it was make or break for me. I had to call Mary at ten, she was at some shower for a girl friend. We were going to get some ice cream later.

The guy in the far right corner made two passes, a four and a nine, not the easiest points on the dice, and as always with me, I was figuring when to quit, how much dough I could make and still walk away.

He threw a seven after the nine, dragged all but five dollars, and on the kind of impulse I always regret I covered him when the losers who had been on him passed. He crapped. He offered five more and I took that. He came out with ten, threw a five, craps, craps again, a nine, and sevens out. I was ten bucks winner and feeling good. I'd have two cracks at the dice. I noticed one guy, pretty big fellow who'd been on him when he made the three passes, looking at me with his jaw at half-mast, and as I lifted my eyes directly to his he said: "Got the percentages, Abie, huh?" He said it in that singsong burlesque which is allegedly the tone of the rag sheeny.

I winked at him and smiled.

He got the dice, started with two bucks, and I was

on him before his hand was away from his money. He crapped. He offered five, I got that, and he crapped again. I saw Bill Bird move until he was behind the guy and a little to his left.

As I reached out for the money, hesitating to give him a chance to get his dough out, the publisher waved his left hand. "Let somebody else in, Joe," he said jovially.

"No," the guy said. "I want Abie." I noticed his fingernails were square, black-rimmed, and when I looked at his hands I saw one knuckle pushed in on his right.

"All right," I told him. "Get it up."

He set a ten down and I dropped two fives. He was a long time with the dice, looking at me while he juggled them, and then he blew on his hand and rolled an eight.

He dropped five dollars on the table before him. "I'm right," he said. There was nobody in the room now but him and me. "You're wrong," I said and threw my fin across.

He rolled six and smiled across at me. "I'm right," he said again and dropped another five. I was a sucker to take that bet. Granted he could seven now and I get fifteen of the twenty bucks, still he had two good points. He rolled ten. "More?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I got enough, Abie." Every time he said Abie was like slapping me in the mouth. Not a punch—that's a legitimate blow—but a slap.

He rolled craps, a five, a nine, craps, and a four. Then he was getting a little worried, just the least bit flustered, for I saw the color appear high on his cheeks and he blew long and hard on the dice as he juggled them.

He threw another four, craps again, another four, and as he picked up the dice rolled them under his hand over the tablecloth before juggling them. Then he threw them straight across the table so they stopped just before me. They showed a three and a four. I tossed them to the man at his left, reached for the money in the center of the table, and then, leaning over, swept up the bills which lay before him.

He was smiling at me, but it was a bad loser's smile. "Pretty lucky, Abie."

I winked at him again, rubbed the sweat from the palms of my hands, and tried to forget he was there as I followed the play.

I had as much chance of forgetting him as Damocles had of ignoring the sword. I was a thirty-seven-dollar winner when he lost the dice, but playing without caution, betting all the time as I tried to get him out of mind, I had thirty-one dollars left of my fifty-seven bucks when the dice reached me.

It was getting near time to call Mary, and thinking of her made me feel lucky. I wanted Abie to fade me, and as I held the dice I looked over at him, smiling to him, trying to taunt him.

"You on me, gambler?" I asked. I threw ten bucks on the table. He covered but he didn't smile. I let the dice go and they came up natural.

"Twenty goes," I announced. "Come on, gambler," I said. He dropped ten on the table, the publisher got the other.

I threw eleven.

I let the money lie as I juggled the dice in my hand. "Forty goes," I said. "Guts, gambler?" The publisher moved his arm, but Abie pushed him off.

"Abie's for me," he said. He borrowed forty from two guys around him and dropped the money over mine.

I let the dice go, but he scooped them up before they stopped rolling. He can do it, that's all right in any friendly game, where there's no house.

But he couldn't do this: he held the dice, looked them over carefully, and then threw them high over his shoulder. He took another set from the small box we'd kittied for and rolled those at me.

"All right, Abie, now we got rid of the kike dice."

I wanted to kill him. If we'd been alone, I think I would have choked him. I scooped up the dice and flung them in his face. Then as they left my hand I started around the table, money in my left hand, all control gone, only the desperate need to get him, to smash him, to break his bones, to get him on the floor and kick his face and his ribs and his groin, to get my hands on his throat and look down at him and produce fear in his face and terror. I wanted to break him, bust him, rip him, hit him and hit him and hit him until he couldn't talk or move or call me Abie again.

I ran straight into Bill Bird's arms.

As I struggled with Bill, looking at Abie, I saw three or four guys holding him, but he wasn't struggling.

"Bill, let me go," I said. I had my hands on his shoulders, trying to push him from me.

"Joe, come on," he said.

"Bill, let me go. Let me go, Bill!"

"Joe." He was so much stronger.

"Bill, please." I dropped my hands. "Bill, please. Bill, let me go. Bill, don't hold me." Why did he hold me, what business was it of his? "Bill." I couldn't move him. I saw the publisher gesturing with his arm, ordering the other men to get Abie out.

"Oh, Bill, please," I said. "Bill, let me go. Bill, goddam you." I dropped my arms again and looked at him. "Bill, goddam you, Bill. Goddam you, Bill, let me go. Goddam you, what business is it of yours? What are you holding me for? Why don't you let me go?" I kept moving my legs but it was like walking on a treadmill. "Let me go, goddam you, I'll never talk to you again! You hear me, you bastard, I'll never look at you, goddam you!" He was Abie too, now he had taken his place with the rest of them.

He got some help from two other men and they moved me sideways out of the room and out through the kitchen of the restaurant into an alley.

Even then he wouldn't release me. "Joe, promise you'll wait for me."

"Get away from me. Go on with the rest of them."

He dropped his arms then, stepped back and looked at me.

"Bill, I'm sorry," I said. "I'm sorry, Bill, for cripes' sake, I'm sorry." This man was my friend, he'd never done me anything but good.

"Will you wait then?" he asked.

"All right." I was trembling still as he went back into

the restaurant. There'd be no action for me to get rid of it, and I'd have to just ride out the shaking. I knew how these things progressed. I'd been initiated a long while back.

He came back and handed me some bills. "Your forty," he said. We turned, neither of us talking, and walked through the alley and out into Sixth Street.

"Maybe you ought to have a drink," he said.

"No, hell with it."

"Coffee?" We were only a few feet from a lunch wagon, walking slowly through the crowd of people waiting for the last Stillwater bus.

"No. I don't want anything. I'm all right, Bill. Honest, you don't have to worry."

"Weren't you supposed to call Mary?" he asked.

"Yeah." Sure, I had to call her. Not enough I could get grief without asking for it, just standing at the crap table, I had to beg for it. Me, I wasn't happy without grief. I needed Mary. I sure needed her, like cholera, that's how I needed her.

"Nobody in the city room," he said. "You can call there." We were through the crowd now, walking slowly, nobody on the street but Bill and me, a couple of citizens, good Americans. He should have let me get one crack at that sonofabitch.

"I'm not going to see her tonight," I said.

"Oh."

"I just don't feel like seeing her," I said. "I don't want to get out of line with her. Way I feel now, I'd be blaming her for what happened."

"Oh."

"That sonofabitch."

"Yeah."

"Why didn't you let me hit him, Bill? What did you gain by holding me?"

He waited until we walked into the almost dark city room before answering. I watched him sit down in his chair, swing his feet up on the desk, push his hat back on his head. I sat down in my chair at his right, my legs crossed.

"You don't gain anything," he said.

"Hell I don't."

"Give me none of that satisfaction routine, Joe. That solves nothing."

"All right." I turned to the phone.

"All right, what?" he asked.

"All right, let's stop talking. I can't talk to you when you say that. You know all the answers, all right. Leave it like that."

"You can't talk to me," he said.

"I can't talk to you about this, no. How can I? Anybody ever call you a kike or make obvious references to your being cheap? Anybody ever call you Abie?"

"They called me mick."

I uncrossed my legs, turned in the chair so I was facing him. "Oh, for cripes' sake," I said, "don't give me that, Bill. Save that. You're too old. I know all about minorities. I write the National Conference of Christians and Jews stories for this paper, remember?"

"Don't come at me with that Pollyanna crap, or with

figures on how all religions are persecuted, all faiths ridiculed, all minorities made sport of. I know the mick routine and the dago business. Stop with that. I don't go for that crap and you don't. If you do, you're a damn fool.

"Don't tell me that these are the few, those creeps who know not what they say. You know better than that, Bill. Holy smokes, I don't even like to talk about it. Holy smokes, it makes me sick to think of it. What are you going to tell me, that most Gentiles *like* Jews? That they give a good flog whether every Jew in the country ever eats or sleeps a night through again or lives through the day?

"I don't want to be felt sorry for, Bill. I'll get by. Just remember that. Do you think I'll be ill if hotels don't want me, or the Sunrise Ridge Country Club or the Gopher Club? Do you think it matters to me if I don't live in Eagle Drive; aren't there enough homes in St. Paul to satisfy me?

"Do you think it bothers me if they turn down ten Hebes for the medical school, or if some crazy one in Minneapolis gets up on a platform and wants Jews killed?

"Do you think I don't sleep because Northern Oil won't hire Jews, or the Dollar Store here in town, or the Best-Baked Bread Company. Let the B'nai B'rith worry, not me.

"I got a job, haven't I? I don't want to save the world, I want to live quiet. I'm a citizen of this country, and if a man gets out of line with me, I just want to prove I can beat his head in, that's all.

"I don't beat my breasts shouting for equality, and I

don't brood about being shut out of a fraternity when I was in school. I don't like fraternities.

"What do you think, tonight is new to me? Listen, Bill, I was no more than six when my pa bought me skates. They were clamps fitting on over the shoe and I carried the key around my neck on a piece of string.

"The rink was across from Edison School on Colorado. We'd skate at night for an hour under the floodlights, and like most kids, I never wanted my parents with me—sign of a sissy or something.

"There was a guy named Conrad, I don't remember his last name, kid of about eight or nine. A no-good kid even then, he did time before he was twenty, knocked up some broad. The last I saw him, he was tending bar on Jackson Street, living with a hustler.

"This night he was standing under the floodlights pole, his gang around him. He grabbed me as I skated by, twisting my arm so that I dropped to my knee for a minute.

"Don't ask me, Bill, how I remember. When it comes to Jew-baiting, I've got eidetic imagery. 'I'm going to punch you in the mouth, sheeny,' he said.

"'Leggo, Conrad, I wanna skate,' I said. There is a certain type of smile, Bill, that you keep for kids like that. He had his gang around him, there wasn't another Jew boy on the rink.

"'You're going to get a good punch on the mouth, Christ-killer,' he said.

"Bill, I was so scared and humiliated. What was just as bad, worse maybe, was the gang around him, coming

from all parts of the rink, watching him, fascinated by the obeisance, some of them maybe afraid and drawn because they knew what I was feeling.

"When he clenched his fist I ducked, and then, his arm raised, 'Get down on your knees, you kike!' he ordered.

"'Oh, Conrad,' I said, 'what's the matter? Let's skate, Conrad. Come on.' Remember, Bill, I was pleading with this little Hitler, begging him, 'Come on, skate, Conrad.'

"Do you know what he did, Bill? He got my arm and began twisting it, wanting me down there before him. You take it to the psychiatrists and tell me his father was a drunk or that he had been ill treated at home. Where do you think he got that stuff, in church? What was I supposed to do, go down on my knees and then go tell his father, sit with some bigot in his kitchen while he told me that he hated Jews?

"He had my right arm and I swung with my left. You know how kids will let their fingernails grow just out of laziness? I ripped that Conrad right across his face. When he howled with the pain, whatever fear was in me left, but the words and the taunts remained. I cut him with my right hand and then began pummeling him on the face and head. We both fell to the ice. I got on top of him, and if we'd been alone, then maybe that kid would never have gotten up. I don't know. Can a kid of six kill a human being? I tried. I wanted to shut his mouth so he'd never say kike to me again."

"You wanted to do it tonight," Bill said.

"It's the only way I know, Bill." I lit a cigarette and held the match for his pipe. "I don't want a part of mass

education or love thy neighbor. My neighbor doesn't love me. None of them, do you understand, they want no part of me, and if you want the truth, that's good with me.

"There's no pogrom in this country, nobody's killing Jews. I can live without Sunrise Ridge, like a king too, and without getting into hotels in Miami. Let the breast beaters worry about that. I don't need any of them."

"You mean me," Bill said.

"Cut it out."

"I'm Gentile."

"For cripes' sake, Bill, you're different. You—why, you—why, Christ, you're like my father."

He took his feet from the desk and stood up, fumbling for matches. He was a long time with his pipe, and then he looked down at me.

"Different," he nodded. "Eh, Joe?"

"Sure, of course you are."

"I'm the white Gentile, Joe, isn't that so?"

"Cut it out."

"And Mary?" He took his pipe from his mouth. "How about her? You were supposed to call her."

"She's different too," I said. "I don't even think of her that way."

He took the phone off the cradle and handed it to me. "I don't think of you that way, bucko," he said.

W

hat can I tell you of my mother? She's my ma, I love her. No matter what's gone, I love her; for cripes' sake, how do you go about hating someone who mistakenly or not wanted only good for you?

Aunt Ruth told me once that when they were girls still living in Russia their mother gave them chores so that every morning each of the daughters—there were five—had a certain job to do. Aunt Ruth and another sister made the beds and cleaned the bedrooms, there were two sisters for the first floor, and Ma helped my grandma in the kitchen.

That wasn't enough for Ma, though, Ruth said. She'd sneak upstairs every day after lunch and remake the beds, resweep the floors, come down and go over the furniture on the first floor. It wasn't clean enough to please her.

I guess our house was always the cleanest in St. Paul. Too clean. I can remember her going over those six rooms twice a week, every week, as thoroughly as most women do spring cleaning.

With Phil and me she was a martinet on cleanliness. There wasn't a day passed until I was thirteen that she didn't scrub me down, head to chest, before I went to bed. You know how it is with kids and underwear, some wearing the same shorts for a week; well, in our house we changed every day from the time I was big enough

to walk. She did the washing all alone and all the ironing.

I guess she held more mother love, a fiercer sense of ownership over her kids, than anyone I've ever known.

She wanted so much for us, but she had no more sense about raising kids than, well, I don't know what.

I couldn't go to swimming class at the Y with the rest of the fourth grade because she was afraid.

Once my dad bought me a bike. The thing was bought and paid for, an old beat-up twenty-eight that I had shown him I could ride, but do you think she'd let me keep it? Nix.

I couldn't go downtown alone until I was twelve, she absolutely forbade it. No football, too dangerous. No hikes with the guys. I discovered the country around St. Paul myself.

Maybe she was the most complete snob I ever knew. Gentiles were out, she'd have nothing at all to do with them, except as they performed any menial tasks for the house, like hauling the ashes, or cleaning the garbage, or decorating, or taking the screens off the windows. That was all goy work.

Not a day in our house, not an hour, that there wasn't reference to the goy, and never in good terms.

Oh yes, the Gentile was given left-handed compliments. I was taught always that the Gentile never worried, that he was handy with his hands, that he could fix things, that he was a drunkard, that he cared not for his children, and that somehow, like the English, he would always muddle through and live a long time after the Jew was dead.

Remember this: she had been raised in a country where all Jews went down into earthen cellars on Good Friday and stayed there until after Easter. Every year. That was happy hunting time for the mujiks. A brother, the baby in the family, got his when he was fifteen. He'd gone swimming with some kids about a mile from town. The pals ran faster. Pa told me about it once. They cut his crotch out.

There was another pogrom around 1905, sometime in there. When the band came through the town, Ma's family was with all the Jews, hiding in caves in the hills two miles from town. They came home two days later. The house was there, but nothing else. Furniture gone, dishes, linens, those few, miserable heirlooms, windows broken. They weren't married then, but Pa told me maybe one hundred men had used the home for an outhouse. Then when they got to the synagogue they found the rabbi, who wouldn't leave with the rest. The Torahs were scattered over the synagogue.

He was propped up in the Ark with his throat cut.

I had to remind myself of these things when I was angry with her. Sometimes I would forget and the old man would remind me.

"Leave her, Joe," he'd tell me after an argument. "Woman is afraid, you understand, afraid? Worst sickness somebody can get, afraid. She got it good."

With all her hatred for the Gentile, she loved Christ as a human being, but referred to him always as a Jew, born of Jews, and crucified by traitorous Jews then taken up by Gentiles.

While both Phil and I were screamed at for mentioning Christmas or anything of the observance of the holiday, I often caught her during the Yule season, the radio offering carols and Ma singing the songs in her fine soprano. When she was confronted with her guilt, she'd only blush and say that the songs were for everybody and that Christ was a Jew.

She was—is—a strange mixture, as strong in her hates as in her loves and constitutionally unable to let herself relax. She has had always a stronger sense of being right than anyone I've ever known, and there was never any great open show of love between us, or between her and Phil or the old man, but I guess except for my marrying, nobody ever did anything, really, that she didn't want done.

Maybe she knew she was licked, knew it deep inside her, when she and the old man found out about Mary.

I met Mary in June. From that first Sunday on I walked thin ice, knowing that in a town the size of St. Paul I'd be seen and my family would learn of her.

Through those first months I took such precautions, maneuvered so skillfully in my dates with Mary, that it

seemed to me we were never seen by anyone who knew me, Jew or Gentile.

Then one Sunday afternoon in October, Bill Bird called me at home around noon to ask if I'd go on police for the night, his regular reporter was sick. I'd doubled there before, sitting in the tiny pressroom at headquarters through dull evenings.

We have dinner Sunday at one to give me a chance at food before I leave. I got down to headquarters at two, checked all the reports, the dispatcher's office, the fire-alarm room, and settled down with the papers in the pressroom, my feet on the desk and the swivel chair bent back with my weight.

I got sleepy reading the papers, and the next thing somebody had my leg, shaking it gently, and I heard the old man waking me and I wondered unreasonably what the hell he was doing in my room in the middle of the afternoon and why he wasn't at work, not realizing this was Sunday.

"Whoa, slow up," he said. "Take easy, want to kill me?" I got my feet on the floor finally and looked up, squinting as I tried to get him in focus. He was wearing a raincoat, peppered with rain, and his hat, on the desk, was wet.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Something wrong, something happen at home?"

He pulled a chair over until he was sitting almost before me. "What happen? Nothing happen? Sin now to come talk with a son? I brought sandwiches, good corned beef, bought myself, fresh pumpernickel." He pointed

to a bag on the desk at our side. "Got green tomatoes, a couple for you."

I stood up, my arms high above my head. "You're a good pa," I said. I rubbed his head as I sat down. "Best old man I ever had."

He got a cigarette out of his pack. "You the best boy I ever had too, kit," he said.

"No fooling now," I warned.

"No fool. True, honest to God."

"I don't feel like eating now," I said. "I'll eat later, break the monotony after you leave."

"Maybe I don't leave," he said.

"You'll have to go home and eat," I told him.

"Maybe I don't eat today." He was grinning, speaking pleasantly. "Maybe," he continued, "I stay with you, take you home, keep you from trouble."

"What's the matter with you? What are you talking about?"

"Maybe I worry you get mixed up with bad womans," he said, still grinning, "need the old man keep you safe."

"For cripes' sake, *what* are you talking about?"

"Joe." He leaned forward on his chair, gathering the coat about him, moving his arm forward on the table, until he was almost bent double. "Joe, you got a shikseh."

"You're crazy."

He shook his head, speaking softly still. "I'm not crazy. Maybe you crazy, not me."

"I got no shikseh, what the hell are you talking about?" I hated to lie thus, as though this were a horrible crime I was concealing.

He nodded. "You got, Joe. With me don't lie. You got."

"Got, for cripes' sake. So I take a shikseh out once in a while. What the hell's wrong with that?"

"Not once in a while."

"Who told you? That's what I want to know," I demanded. "Who told you?"

"Never mind who told. No secret in St. Paul. What's difference who told? You got, huh, Joe, you got?" He nodded. "You got, Joe, yes."

"Oh, what the hell, so I see a girl once in a while. So what?"

"Not once a while. You see all the time, Joe, yes? Don't lie with old man, Joe. Yes?" He nodded. "Yes?"

"You know everything, you tell me," I said.

"I tell you, kit, I tell you quit. Quit quick. Now. Say good-by, Joe, and stop and hell with it."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing the matter with me, kit. Nothing the matter with you, I hope," he said.

"Oh, cut it out. Geez, you sound like I was dead. I'm not going to marry the girl."

I saw the color go out of his face. He let his hands fall between his legs, and when he looked up again his cheeks seemed to be hollow and his eyes were pleading with me. "I hope not, Joe. By God," he said, almost whispering, "I hope not, Joe."

I laughed at him, put my hand out to touch his arm. "Take it easy, Pa, for Pete's sake. I'm not going to marry anybody. I told you a long time ago I wasn't getting married, didn't you believe me?"

"No, don't believe you. Man should marry, but to shikseh, never, Joe."

"Well, forget it."

"I can't forget, kit. These things I don't forget. I tell you something, maybe you better stop. Now isn't so hard, you quit."

"Don't worry about it."

"Quit now, before you can't quit, Joe. Before Ma learns, will be terrible." He shook his head. "Poor woman is nervous now enough, Joe, would kill her if she learns."

"Who's to tell her?"

He shrugged. "Million people, that's all. Only every Jew in St. Paul could tell her." He became suddenly angry. "What's the matter, you're crazy? You're crazy, you damn fool? You got nice girl, yes? All right, you going to go in bed with this nice girl, if not now, later a month, two, three maybe. If you sleep with womans, then not easy to quit, Joe, remember. You tell her you're going to marry?"

He'd chastised me with the outburst. "No. No, she knows I can't."

"She don't know," he said. "No woman knows. Maybe for you will be all right, see her, hide, go in bed when you can, but not for womans. For womans is one thing, marry. One thing they want, marry and kids. Now she satisfied she got you, later she starts with marry."

"Not Mary."

"No," he mocked, shaking his head, his lower lip thrust out in caricature. "Not Mary. You damn fool, any womans, you hear me, or you are deaf this minute now? Any womans."

"I'll quit," I said. I had to quit. Sooner or later I had to check out of this grisly thing, and now I had the reason, the force behind me. The old man would back me up, he'd always been able to pull me over the rough spots. Now there was nothing to hold me with her, and even she would realize that we were licked.

"I hope."

"I will. I swear I will. I swear to God"—suddenly vehement in my talk—"I'll quit and fast." I was so thankful to this man for being so kind, for understanding, for always, no matter what the circumstances, being on my side in anything with which I was involved. Mary was the villain here, the intruder. I stood up and moved behind him. "Here, sit here," I said. "Damn me, did I ever tell you you're the best old man I ever had?"

"All I want," he said. "That's what I want, nothing else. Money, no, too late now. For my kits the best, what's good, that's all." He rose. "Ma's going to worry if I'm not home," he said.

I got his arms and pushed him down into my chair. "She won't worry that much. Call her then and tell her you're down here."

"Good-looking woman, Joe? Pretty?"

Thinking of her made me warm, and if he was not blind, then he didn't have to listen to me but just look at my face. "I don't know, Pa. I think she's beautiful. Sometime when I'm alone I try to figure where her beauty lies, but I can't. Yet I can say she's lovely, Pa, she's good, she's kind, she's gentle, she's understanding, she's about everything."

"Except not Jewish," he put in.

"Yeah."

"Joe, maybe you go away, different city somewhere, work there six months or a year," he suggested.

"Don't you trust me, for Pete's sake?"

"Trust, that's nice word, trust. Sure, I trust you, believe you. I think you honest want to stop."

"I will."

He got up from the chair. "All right, kit, you the boss. Free country here, America, kids do what they want."

"Pa!"

He looked up and walked the three steps from the chair to the door, then he put his back to it. "Joe, you quit."

"I'm telling you yes. Tonight. Leave the keys in the car."

"Yes, Joe."

"I'm telling you I'll quit and I will." I offered my hand and he took it, putting his left hand over mine.

"Joe, better for you, for her, for everybody. Can't live, Jew and goy, can't live, that's all."

I felt so sorry for him, putting him through all this. "Pa, I swear."

"Hope so," he said. "Joe, one thing?"

"Yeah?"

"Tell me if trouble. Whatever I can, I'll help. You know?"

"Sure."

"All right." He ran his hand under his nose, then pointed at the sandwiches. "Eat, Joe, is good corned beef."

I quit that night. We were in the car talking until dawn, she crying and then me crying, and then both of us together. It was a peaceful parting, an emotional one, and I went home proud that I'd pleased and served my folks.

It was four days that time. She called to ask for a book of hers, just put it in the mail, she said. I told her I'd bring it over.

You live long enough with a woman and being without her for an hour when there is no good reason becomes unbearable. My cheeks were flushed from the sun and too much smoking.

The cabin was cool, but my head had begun to throb a little, and I thought maybe a shower would get the heat from my face and make me hungry enough to want to eat.

In the bedroom I found shorts and skivvy shirts piled neatly in my drawer, sweat socks and sport shirts in two others. I gathered the clean clothes in my arms and ambled into the bathroom. I felt as though the heat outside had slowed me, covered me with a complete lassitude, but I knew that her absence affected me in this way.

I stripped down in the bathroom, pushed the clothes

I was changing deep into the laundry basket and hung my pants on a peg high on the door, taking care they didn't brush against the bath towels with our initials that her mother had given us last Christmas.

That made me remember too. Christ, the cabin was full of memories today, scattered like so many stage props in every room. I closed the door of the shower stall and let the warm water come down on me, feeling my body loosen, held almost spellbound under the spray, but the memories of that one Christmas in the second year we knew each other stayed with me and my cheeks would not fade or cool when I remembered what it had brought.

So many things I *couldn't* do. Couldn't go to church with her, not even to observe; couldn't meet her friends; couldn't get married like ordinary people; couldn't ever come halfway down the line with her.

That first Christmas I found excuses. Her mother called me at the office, asking that I come Christmas Eve and have dinner with them the next day, but I told her I was working, couldn't make it.

Mary knew why I wouldn't come. She said nothing then nor during most of the year following. I was home for Thanksgiving dinner, but that night when I saw her she said I had to be at her house Christmas Eve.

"Mary."

"Joe. Joe, you can't say no this time. You simply can't say no, Joe, don't you know that? Don't you know what they'll do to me if I tell them you won't come?"

What did I know of Christmas? In grade school, always in December, when the teacher would lead the class in

singing, the Jewboys had a set of obscenities for all the words, each of us humming the tune and providing our own lyrics, thinking ourselves so wise and clever. If the teacher knew, she never showed it. We were not required to sing, any of us could have been excused, and yet what harm to those beautiful melodies?

I knew it was not our holiday for as far back as I can think. Later, as I grew older, it became the fashion to send Christmas cards, and in this practice many Jews I knew joined, but I felt always it was an affectation and was never a participant.

It became correct to exchange gifts, and a few Jewish families in town, the young, uninhibited, intellectual set, even set up Christmas trees in their homes and thus became the talk of every Jew group in town until the New Year.

"Mar', next year."

"Joe, you have to."

"I won't. I'm Jewish, and I don't believe in Christmas, don't you understand that? You don't hear me asking you to come down to the synagogue on Passover or the High Holidays, do you?"

She spoke to her coke. "I've been hoping you would, Joe."

There was no answer to that. I figured I'd go this once. Next year I'd be out of the mess anyway, away from her somehow.

Nevertheless, I took elaborate precautions. Christmas that year was Friday. I switched my days off, working Tuesday for a guy who agreed to let me take Friday. I

told my family nothing of this, saying only when I left the house Tuesday that I was going to play handball and have dinner downtown.

Bill Bird called me Friday around noon, as we'd planned. I let the phone ring for my mother to answer. "Joe, is Bill Bird," she yelled into the living room.

"Yeah, Bill," I said. This was my excuse for staying away overnight.

"Joe, you have to do something for me. Farmer near Brainerd killed his wife and kid and they got him in jail there. The publisher wants us to get a story from him. You can get a bus downtown at two o'clock. Better pack a small bag, you may have to spend the night up there."

"Yeah, sure, Bill. I'll do it right away. Near Brainerd, eh?"

"Right. You'd better get a move on."

"Okay." I walked into the kitchen. "Ma, you better not figure to make me anything for supper." I usually ate ahead of the family, just before going to work. "I got to go to Brainerd. Grab a bus."

"A bus! With roads so slippery. Why don't the goy go himself? No, he sends the Jew to go, like a dog by them, for any kind terrible job." She usually liked Bill.

"Ma, those busses are safe. I'll be back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow! Overnight there in the wilderness full of goyim!"

"Oh, cut it out. I've got to pack a bag. Now take it easy and don't worry."

"Don't worry, he tells me. Why shouldn't I worry? Run

with goyim day and night, Jewish people are not good enough for you."

I left her in the kitchen and went to pack, eager to get out of the house and out of her shouting range. The prospect of the night and day to come suddenly filled me with anticipation and it seemed now that I was going on a holiday.

I dressed carefully, packed a razor, a toothbrush, and a change of underwear, and left the house, Ma's shouting still in my ears.

Bill Bird lives on the other side of town. It was an hour's trolley ride, and when I got there Kay and Bill were in the kitchen. I kissed Kay and poured myself coffee.

"Why'd you marry this slob, Kay," I asked, "when you could have had me by whistling?"

"Joe," she said, "I'll never forgive myself."

"It's not too late for you two," Bill said.

Kay laughed. "It's getting too late for you, isn't it, fatso?"

He reached under the table to grab her knee. "You and your earthiness," he said. "I'll find out how earthy you are." He got up and came around the table after her, face distorted, hands out, with space enough between them for her throat. "Let's put up or shut up," he said.

"Joe," she said. "Joe," she screamed in mock terror. "Joe, help me."

"You nuts?" I asked. "He's my boss."

Bill weaved around us, growling, pulling his hair down over his head, until I got his arm and pushed him back

into the chair. "Ya got me," he gasped, falling back, his head against the wall.

"Bill, darling, your coffee is getting cold," Kay warned.

"How do you like that, Joe? See what you're getting into when you figure marriage? You want to play and your old lady tells you your coffee is getting cold."

I wasn't planning marriage. He had me mixed with somebody else. I was just trying to get out of a mess, that's all. "Kay," I said, "where are those packages?"

"In the front closet. They're up on top. You can have them when you go," she said.

I'd been friend of these two since the week I'd started on the paper. Bill Bird was a man of thirty-five who'd come down to the university from Helena, with no parents behind him and enough money to see him through school. He'd started working for the paper when he was in college and, through a combination of talent and luck, had been made city editor at twenty-seven, a not common trick even in a town the size of St. Paul. He'd met Kay at the university during freshman week, when both were registering, and it had never been anyone else for him. She'd majored in sociology, taken a master's in the year that Bill was cubbing on the *News*, and they'd been married three days after she got that degree.

They were the finest people I'd ever known. I'd let Bill in on the little he couldn't see for himself in my relationship with Mary almost from the start. Not long after we began seeing each other I'd brought Mary out.

After Bill left for work I lay on the couch while Kay got their Christmas dinner working. She came out to

smoke a cigarette with me. "You're going to enjoy it to-night, Joe," she said.

"I know." I smiled at her.

"Bill and I were talking this morning. You kids have had such a tough time. I hope everything works out."

"I hope so."

"Nobody deserves it more than you two."

"That's kind talk, Kay."

"It's true, Joe. Mary's such a fine girl. She's lucky and you're lucky."

"I know I am."

"Give her an even chance, Joe."

"How do you mean?"

"Joe, I guess next to Bill I think more of you than any man I know. You're Bill's best friend— Oh, don't raise your hand, keep still now. I'm full of the Yule spirit, and maybe one Tom and Jerry too much or I wouldn't say this. I know what you feel for Bill and you can't censure him for talking with me, Joe, he's my husband."

"Who's censuring you?"

"Well, just try to give Mary a chance. Joe, you know I've never braced you with my sociology, but one thing I've known for a long time—and don't be angry, please—is that Jews do have a sort of persecution complex. Of sorts, Joe. Just give her a chance, she's under as much strain as you are, Joe."

"Sure."

"Joe, you know that Bill and I want nothing more than your happiness. I *know* it can work out for you two if you give yourselves a chance."

Why didn't she stop talking?

"Don't censure her for everything, Joe. Bill told me you didn't want to be at Mary's for Christmas. Why, Joe, why, Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. Why, Christmas symbolizes all that's good in the world, all of Christ's teachings, you know that. There can't be anything wrong with a day in which people just want to give things."

"I didn't say there was."

"She wants you with her because she's happy and who else besides you does she love?"

"Yeah, I guess that's right." I got up and stretched. "I'd better get going."

Kay rose and walked toward me. She held my face in her hands and then bent it forward to kiss the top of my head. "We love you, Joe," she said seriously.

"And I you, Kay. Merry Christmas, Kay."

"Merry Christmas, Joe."

I got my coat and hat and found the packages I'd bought for Mary, for her parents, for Kay and Bill. I put the last two under the tree, and when I turned to gather up my parcels she was standing by the door, a package in her hands. "For Mary, Joe, and for you."

"Thanks, dear," I said.

"Thanks for yours, Joe."

"God grant we're here and healthy next year."

"Joe, that's very nice," she said. "Where did you hear that?"

"It's a bad translation of a Yiddish benediction common at all holidays."

"God grant we're here and healthy next year," she said slowly. "Joe, God grant you and Mary are together and happy next year."

"Amen," I lied.

I could not lose the feeling of good things to come as I rode toward Mary's house. The sun had made a short appearance when I'd ridden to Bill's house, but now it was gone, the streets ice-packed and gray with dirty snow. We rode over a bridge spanning railroad tracks and the wind flung itself against the trolley, jealous of its presence on the near deserted street.

In the Loop the trolley filled and I sat pushed against the window, my arms full, hoping nobody my family knew would get on. It was a long, tedious ride from then on, the trolley stopping every block once it was out of the Loop, and the air filled with whisky smell and the strong odors of pounds and pounds of nuts and candy. The trolley held cheerful people tonight, everybody smiling, and suddenly, as we passed Lexington Avenue, a fellow up ahead of me kissed a girl on the cheek and the news traveled through the car, everybody laughing, including the girl who had been kissed. The uproar grew, the girl blushed, leaned over quickly, and pecked the man's cheek and the people went wild. This was Christmas spirit I was watching, all right, and the sight of all these strangers, nobody knowing anyone else, gathered together by a common, universal good-fellowship set a glow in me as welcome as a warm bed.

The car emptied of almost a third of its passengers at

Snelling. I was asked to drink by several strangers, and while I wanted to, still Mary and her family were waiting and I thought I'd better get going.

Portland Avenue was beautiful. It lay in the last few minutes before darkness, the street still and deserted and the lights from the trees in each house presenting a post-card appearance that made it unreal. Some homes had colored lights draped along the roof and the porch; one yard had a small papier-mâché display of the Nativity, with tiny, doll-like figures against a bright blue crepe-paper sky. Across the street on Mary's side a house held a lighted cross, and as I started up the walk of the Simpson home the door opened and Mary stood holding it, wearing a soft red silk-looking dress, her hair brushed straight down and held with a ribbon. There was a lighted wreath in the window, their tree was lit, and it presented such a picture of peace and quiet and warmth and security that I felt in that instant it was my home and we were married and she was waiting dinner.

She was smiling. "Let me help you, darling." She pushed her face at me for a kiss and I brushed her lips, afraid lest her mother or father see us. "Scared cat," she said, taking the packages from my arm with one hand and pulling her dress from her with the other. I got out of my coat and hung it in the closet. As I turned, Mrs. Simpson came out of the kitchen, her arms wide, to me. She held my elbows and kissed my cheek. "Merry Christmas, Joe," she said.

"Merry Christmas, Mrs. Simpson." She put her arm through mine and we walked into the living room.

"George will be down in just a little while," she said. She pointed at the bowl of Tom and Jerrys on the piano. "Help yourself, Joe," she said.

"Right." I rubbed my hands. "I need some warmth."

Mary was there, filling two cups. "Mother can't have any more," she cried. "She'll get stiff."

"Mary," her mother said. "Darling, is that very nice?"

Mary looked at me. She was radiant. We could have darkened the tree and the wreath and the entire house and she would have lighted up the place. "I don't care." She laughed out of sheer happiness. "Joe, you see, Mother can't drink and she gets tipsy and always wants to lead the singing. Oh, Joe, Mother's singing!"

"Singing?" I asked.

"Carols, darling," she said. "After dinner. We always sing carols on Christmas Eve. Uncle Mark and Aunt Hilda are coming and I'll teach you how to sing." She raised herself on tiptoe, so that her lips were at my ear. "So you can teach our children, darling."

I smiled at her while the knife went deeper and deeper into my heart, turning and twisting until I wanted to run from the house, scream out for help, ask aid for my adventure that had so soon ended so miserably. She had brought me back to St. Paul all right. I don't know where I'd been, in some fool's Eden, projecting myself out of reality and running from the harsh light of the truth.

What was I doing here? What had possessed me to come here, take the first step toward becoming a goy myself? I was swept with a revulsion toward the house, with a fear for what it held and for what it betokened for

me. I was no enlightened, civilized young man with the friendship of the world in my heart. I didn't want to learn Christmas carols, have kids who would sing Christmas carols. Look at me, I thought, standing here with my back to this grand piano, holding a Tom and Jerry and smiling at this woman who wants to marry me. Look at me, Joe, the traitor, the dumb fool who had to go find trouble. Look at me, the son of a woman who wouldn't allow gelatine in her home because it was made of calves' hoofs and the calves were slaughtered without benefit of ritual. Look at me here, celebrating the birth of a man, or a God, whose death had been the basis of two thousand years of pogroms and persecution.

It was her fault. Why had she insisted on my coming? Why did she need me here, wasn't she satisfied with our seeing each other? What was this now with children? There had never been mention of marriage before. Look at me and the presents I'd bought, the bag I packed to spend the night in this house.

All right. Damn me, all right. I'd finish the party now. I'd finish it and let her go with her family. That's what puzzled me. With me, I didn't want her embracing Judaism. I didn't want her coming to the synagogue, cripes, I hadn't been in one myself in almost ten years. I didn't want her meeting Jews, being forced to like them. Couldn't she live with me alone? I guess that was it, all right. She couldn't, she had to act like I was a bloody collegian, coming for the holidays, meeting her aunt and uncle.

I thought of my old man, lying on the couch now,

probably, and the radio going, and he listening to the Christmas carols and maybe remembering what they did to Jews in Russia on Easter Sunday. I thought of my ma in the kitchen, worrying about me up in Brainerd, and all the subterfuge and lying and cheating and hiding I'd done in a year and a half. Well, this was the big casino, now all right. I'd have a Christmas to remember, now all right.

George Simpson came down the stairs and walked toward me, his hand out. "How are you, sir?" I asked.

"Merry Christmas, Joe."

"Merry Christmas, sir," I said.

He filled himself a cup of Tom and Jerry, turning again to smile at me and Mary, she with her hand resting on my shoulder, and he was not that much a fool that he didn't see the shine in her face.

"Cute," he said, cocking his head at her.

"In a way," I admitted.

"She may pass."

"Can't tell."

"Oh, you two," she said delightedly, "you're terrible." Her hand pressed into my shoulder.

"Dinner," Mrs. Simpson said. The old boy offered his arm gallantly and I followed with Mary. The table was beautiful and the dinner excellent. We all drank more wine than we should have and some of the fear left me. I wanted to get drunk good, but was afraid I'd act out of line.

After the demitasse, Simpson rose and looked down at us. The maid had turned down the lights and we sat in

the soft glow of the candles. Looking at Mary, it seemed to me she had never been more beautiful, and while I knew now that I had to quit seeing her, I felt almost pleasantly sad, as though this were something, this relationship, that had been destined to end disastrously. "A toast," he said. He raised his glass. "To peace for men and the teachings of Christ in the world."

We drank to that and I rose. Let's see how they drank to a Jew toast. "God grant we're here and healthy next year."

"Why, that's a lovely thought," said Mrs. Simpson.

Mary looked as though she would burst with pride. "Where did you learn that, Joe?"

"An old Jewish saying," I answered. "It's not a good translation, for you lose the idiom."

"Joe, it's beautiful," Mary said as we drank.

Simpson rapped a knife against his water glass. "I'd like to make an announcement," he said. "Hear, hear. Want to make an announcement." We became self-consciously still. He reached out for his wife's hand and then with his other arm for Mary's hand. "We three, Joe, have lived alone for a long time. We've always had our own celebrations, just the three of us. Christmas has been ours, and Easter. Our anniversary, Mary's birthday." He paused. Then he rose and walked around and gave me his hand. "Welcome to this house, Joe," he said. "Welcome to this house."

I wanted to weep for all of us sitting there. I rose and thanked him. Mary came around the table to put her arm around me and Mrs. Simpson slipped in under the old

boy's arm. We stood there for almost a minute, and then Mary, sensing the awkwardness, cried: "I'm going to take Mother in the kitchen or she'll be after the Tom and Jerry bowl."

That broke it. We moved into the living room, and when the bell rang Simpson went. I heard him crying hellos to Mark and Hilda. Then he appeared with two people about as old as the Simpsons, and I wondered why I hadn't guessed the man's identity when Mary mentioned his name. So Mark Jennings was her uncle.

He owned a plumbing manufacturing firm, the largest in the Northwest, maybe the largest in the country. His washbowls, his tubs, have been in your home probably since it was built. His father had started the business, but this guy, when he came home from college, had really made it big. He'd built a new building far out on the River Road, he'd spent a great deal of money advertising. He was a hard-working boy, this Jennings, and he was a hard-playing boy. Two years ago he bought the St. Paul professional football team and that's when I got to know him real well.

There's a fellow named Stern in this town. Jack Stern. I don't think you've heard of him unless you live in the Middle West. He played a pretty good tackle for Minnesota two years running. Then he went into the medical school and, after his sophomore year there, needed money. He worked the summer as a counselor in a Jewish camp up North, and when he was approached with a four thousand dollar offer to play one season of ball for the pro football team, he took it. He took it, that is, but

he never signed a contract. He was going to do that when he came down from camp, and meanwhile he got squared away at the medical school so he could stay out for the year.

Then Jennings bought the team and Stern was out. I heard it from the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League. Ordinarily I don't give a good damn for any of that, but I knew Stern, we'd gone to school together, and he really could have used the money to such good advantage. Medical school is tough enough without worrying about gelt. The B'nai B'rith asked me what to do and I said to shut up and take it. There was nothing they could do. Stern hadn't signed a contract, and without the printed word he could go to work at Swift's in South St. Paul. And he did.

That was all right, up to there. A man can dislike whom he wants to and it's all right with me. But Jennings is a publicity hound; the sonofabitch has a standing order with any of the *News* photographers for a dozen prints of any picture he is in. I knew him.

Two weeks after the Stern deal I ran across him in the Gopher. You'd think I was king of the hill the way he helloed me. "Joe, you have to drink with me," he said. He was with a party of about eight, men and women, and nothing would do but I had to pull up a chair and he introduced me around. Most of the people had seen my by-line and knew who I was. This guy didn't let them forget. Then with me he started the same old crap, arm around my shoulder too. He knew how I worked on the paper, he said, and he just wanted me to know that with

him it didn't make a damn bit of difference who a man was, what his name was or his church. Oh, it was sickening. Some of his best friends, et cetera. Honest to God, that was the line I got.

Now I had to shake hands with him and with his wife. He was as cordial as ever, telling Simpson we were old friends, and nothing but that we had to drink to Joe-boy. He was talkative, he was friendly, he was charming, and all the time I knew he was waiting to get to Simpson and ask the old boy if he was out of his head letting Mary mess with the kike.

Oh, I knew this guy, all right. I knew him good. I was in a nest of terrorists here, all right. This was the life I'd have, pretending to be friendly with people like Mark Jennings, the white-haired bigot, and all the time he hating my guts and I his. It seemed to me then that I couldn't go ten minutes without something cutting across my eyes to remind me I didn't belong here, that these people were not for me nor was I for them.

One thing, it turned out the Jenningses weren't her real uncle and aunt. The Simpsons had been their friends through all of Mary's life and she called them such out of habit.

This was the tableau around the piano: Mrs. Simpson playing, the old boy with his hands on her shoulders, the Jenningses to their right, and then Mary and me.

When Mrs. Simpson struck the chords of "O Come, All Ye Faithful!" my throat choked. I was back in the classroom once more, wanting to say obscene words. Simpson saw that I wasn't singing, that the sound from my lips was

a reluctant humming, and he turned his head from me, his voice loud and strong, and maybe at that instant he broke with me.

I knew "Silent Night" about as well as I knew "On Wisconsin," the football rouser, recognizing the melody and some of the words but not certain of the lyrics at all. Mary was so happy there. She had her arm around me, singing for all she was worth, and when she would look up, not losing a note, I would smile and nod and sing one or two words, cursing myself inwardly all the time.

What a farce this was! What a game I played here, fooling them all but Simpson and myself, pretending to like all of this and all the time cursing them.

They sang "Good King Wenceslas" and then "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "Adeste Fidelis." Then Simpson moved back and got my arm. "A real drink, Joe," he said.

We got ourselves two bourbons and water and sat on the sofa watching them sing, while Mary made faces at me. Simpson was smart, all right. He didn't crack about the singing, and somehow, when I was away from the piano, I felt better too.

We talked about politics. We talked about the *News*. We talked about handball; I knew he played at the athletic club. We talked about everything but Christmas and Mary. I wondered if he was having as bad a time as I was.

After the singing we sat around eating nuts and sipping wine. Maybe if I ever want to make a buck I'll go on the stage, for surely no woman in Christendom was happier than Mary that night.

Later, when the Jenningses had gone and the Simpsons were sleeping and I lay in the guest-room bed smoking, Mary opened the door and slipped into the room. She sat on the bed and bent to kiss me, and then lay thus, her cheek against mine. She was wearing a thin bathrobe over her pajamas and she was very desirable.

"Wasn't it wonderful, darling?" she whispered.

"Wonderful."

"Did you think of how it would be when we have children?"

"How many are you planning, Mrs. Dionne?"

"Ummm. Ten."

"That's a reasonable figure."

She kissed my cheek, and then I held her face in my hands and kissed her firmly and long. She collapsed against me, her lips in my neck. "Joe," she whispered.

"Yes, darling."

"Oh, Joe." She moved her legs until she was lying on me.

"Hello," I whispered.

"Joe, I wish they weren't home. Is that terrible?"

"Terrible."

"Oh, Joe, I love you so much."

"I love you, Mary."

"This is the best Christmas I've ever had. Don't ever be away for Christmas, darling."

"Never," I said.

Drying myself after the shower, I remembered the last time I'd showered in the athletic club and the hour which preceded it.

I'd never thought Simpson was a really big man until I stepped into the handball court at the club and, slamming the small door shut, turned to see him warming up. He wore white shorts, sneakers, sweat socks, and handball gloves. He was man all the way. He had an enormous chest, not big so much as wide, and his fingers were long, his arms long and wiry with huge wrists. He was built for a handball player even to the solid behind that I saw as he bent to kill a ball.

After playing at the Y, this court, 24 by 48, was like a barn. You may not think sixteen yards is a long haul from front to rear court, but it's the end of the road when you've been run around awhile. I'd suggested playing the Y when he called, but he said that he liked a bigger court. I agreed to come down to his bailiwick.

I was just a little nervous. I play a good game, sure, but in all the three years I'd known Mary he'd never asked me to play. I hadn't even seen him for a month; he and Mrs. Simpson had been up near Ely fishing. Then today this phone call. I hadn't had enough sleep really to play, but you don't turn Simpson down, it wouldn't look good.

Get the court in your head. It's 24 by 48, as I said, one

of the biggest in the country, varnished hardwood floor and whitewashed walls. The back wall is cut down from the ceiling with a tiny balcony for a gallery. At three o'clock of a July afternoon there was nobody there, and even with the tremendous heat outside, the walls were cool and soothing and the air in the court cool, although stuffy.

I watched him for a minute as I pulled on my gloves. He had two wonderful hands, I saw that immediately, using the left as fluidly and naturally as the right, and with those long arms he was like a double scoop shovel. He'd be very hard to pass, I decided. I'd have to play him high, slamming the ball near the ceiling to get him out of the forecourt, or I'd have to kill, and I didn't have the best kill shot in the city.

I got my gloves on and started throwing the ball to the front wall, letting my arms get loose and swinging them both as I walked for balls. He was trying his scoop shots, tossing the ball against the rear wall and then moving to get into position as he picked the ball off and whipped it to the front. You see, in four-wall handball, the ball is in play as long as it remains in the air, that is, once it's hit the front.

I don't want to get too technical. When a man serves, he lets the ball touch the floor, bats it to the front wall and then out it comes, and if he can make it hit another wall and the ceiling, fine.

He waited until I was good and loose and then got a new ball out of a small box in the corner and, tossing it to me, told me to serve. I didn't want a new ball. With

this barn of a court and a live ball the game would be much too fast, but I said nothing. "Go ahead," I said, tossing it back at him.

He smiled. "I'm fifty, Joe. I need favors," he said, walking to the service line.

He served low, the ball just passing the short line to my left hand, and as I went to it the ball hopped almost two feet and away from me. "Nice shooting," I said. He just smiled. He served again, in almost the same spot. This time I got my left hand on it. That is, I touched the ball, as you stick out your hand to touch a branch when you're driving, and just the contact left my fingers twinging.

He served to the opposite wall and my right hand. I hit it, but the ball caromed from my wrist and rose softly to the front wall. He moved two steps, took it off the front wall in the air, and slammed it into the corner for a kill.

I moved back until, by putting my hands behind me, I could touch the back wall. I'd see the ball coming, anyway, and if it was too fast, let it lose some speed against the back wall. I could take the serve from there. He served right into the left-hand corner, and I came out with it, hitting it high to his right. He moved up, hugging the forecourt, swung as it lost height, and drove back to my left. I wanted him out of the forecourt and I charged in, batting back before the ball had hit the floor and moving forward, but he merely took two steps to the right and hit it into the wall low, right in front of him. He hadn't hit low enough and it was too hard. The ball came back,

but he stood before me, bent low, his hands on his knees, and to get at the ball I had to move him. He got out of the way, but not in time. "Foul, Joe," he said.

"Fair and square."

"You're the boss."

"No, it's a point, honest. Serve 'em up." He had three points and he was crowding the rules. All right. I'd play the game his way.

He went to seven before I got him out. I was trying hard not to get mad at him; losing my temper would cinch the game in his favor. It was just the way he played: his big behind hiding every shot in the forecourt, moving back at me after he'd hit a ball, and usually directly before it, so that I had to keep one hand pushing him always to get a shot. He wasn't seven points better than me, either. I could see that. He hit an awfully hard ball, maybe as hard as anybody I'd ever played against, but he wasn't a smart player. He was just using every trick in the book to hold me in the backcourt and keep me off balance.

I got a point by passing him with a waist-high ball, after he'd returned my serve to my left hand and I fooled him by driving it back to his left. That's the same as a southpaw hitting into left field.

I hit my second serve high, so that it went to the front wall and then the right, arching high toward his left hand.

I bent, waiting for the shot, my body facing the front, when suddenly, just as I turned to see where he'd hit it, the ball struck me in the small of the back. It was as though I'd been jabbed with a thousand needles by a mighty hand. I bent back as far as I could, my hands

going automatically to the spot where the ball had hit. Holy smokes, I hurt. I'd never been hit so hard, and what was worse, he'd hit me deliberately. There was plenty of room for him to drive the ball, this wasn't doubles, where your vision is obscured, and he had no excuse. If the ball had not hit me, it would have touched the front wall at a spot maybe two feet from the floor for an easy point for me. He'd just taken aim and hit me.

"I'm sorry, Joe," he said, walking toward me. "Hurt? Does it hurt bad?"

"Naah. Like a feather," I said.

"Hinder," he said.

"Yeah." The ache spread all over my back and I wanted to cry out with the pain. I served to his left, but he killed the ball from the air, using the two walls to my right in a beautiful shot.

"Nice shooting," I said.

He grunted as he passed me on the way in to serve. He went to fifteen on that serve, and there was nothing I could do. Not a thing. He just played me dirty, yet I couldn't have cried foul if we'd had a scorer and a referee and a gallery full of spectators. He was determined to play that way; he hit a much harder ball than I did, and he was big, just too big for me to get him out of the way.

I got three points in my service and I noticed he was beginning to sweat. Me, I'd been having trouble moving since he got to ten points. One thing I had on him, I was twenty-five years younger. I hit a high, soft ball to his left hand, with nothing on it, and made up my mind to

concentrate only on returning the ball, nothing more. He drove it to my right, and I hit soft again, lobbing back to his left hand and chasing him into the corner. When he returned I noticed he was coming in fast, so I lobbed again, high over his head. He had to run to get it, and I had him then, but I let the ball bounce off the front wall, took my time, and as he stood almost at my side, waiting, I hit high once more. He charged in ahead of me, his left hand held almost straight out, and slammed it into the front wall directly before him. He'd gotten away with it long enough; I pushed him out of the way, and he went down on the floor. I drove it over on the other side of the court and knee-high for my point. "Sorry, sir," I said, offering my hand. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I wanted that one, I guess."

He rolled over away from me and scrambled to his feet. "Forget it, serve them," he said curtly. "You haven't hurt me."

I served high again, but he hit in the air, sending the ball in just over my head and charging in behind me. I swung just as he passed me, and he took the ball awkwardly, hitting it into the wall before him again, and then spreading his legs wide so it would not touch him for my point, but giving me absolutely no chance to get my hand on it before it bounced twice.

He went after the ball himself, then came down to the service line and turned to me. "Ready?" he asked.

"I don't want to complain, sir," I said, "but you're crowding that ball so I don't get a chance at it."

"Call hinder, Joe," he said solicitously. "Please call

them as you see them. I'll respect your judgment, we're not playing tournament."

"Hell, I'm not going to call hinder. Hell with it. Hell, you know if they're hinders, sir, but maybe I'm just beefing as a loser." I smiled at him. "Serve 'em up."

I didn't understand this man. He couldn't be like this all the time; there'd be nobody in the club to play with him. Still, what was the sense to him doing it to me? He could beat me fair and square, he was at least three points better than me. He served straight back into the center of the court and low. I couldn't help hitting him, it was all I could do to get the ball back. The ball glanced off his right leg. His smile when he turned to me was like a cop finding an old offender picking a lock. "Trying to make it even, Joe?" he asked.

"Holy smokes, sir," I protested. "That isn't fair."

"Okay." He was still smiling. "It wasn't fair." He didn't offer to apologize.

He set me down in that service. It didn't feel good, but what he did when he got to twenty was what really hurt. There is no false generosity in handball, just as there is none in tennis. A match-point service is the deadliest the player can summon, and so it is in handball. When he served for game point he let the ball drop gently to the floor, waited until it was waist high, and then hit at it underhand, cupping the ball easily in his hand and lobbing to the front so that it came right down the middle, with no more speed on it than if a woman had struck it. It was as deliberate as a slap in the face, and in my anger, trying to kill cold, my ball hit the floor first for his point.

He turned smiling, his hands on his hips, and then walked to the left rear corner for his towel. He was very slow wiping his face and arms and then: "Ready, Joe?" he asked.

I figured there was no gain to being a sorehead. "You're too good for me, sir," I said. "Damned frustrating playing you." I'd found my towel and was wiping my chest and face.

"Come on," he said. "One more."

I shook my head, forcing the friendly smile to my face. "Pass," I said. "I'm not in your league, sir, you know that."

He nodded, his towel around his neck. "I know it, Joe. You bet I know it. I brought you up here so that you'd know it. The Simpsons are not in your league, Joe." He was walking toward me. "Not Mrs. Simpson, not me, and not Mary." He was standing right in front of me now. I could see the pulse in his throat and the whiteness of his face from the game. He had his gloves off now, holding them in his left hand, and his chest was still heaving with the exertion.

"I don't understand, sir," I said.

"Maybe you don't, Joe," he said. "Maybe, by God, you really don't." He put out his hand so that it rested against the back wall, and I saw suddenly that he needed the support.

"Let's go down, sir." There was something a little unreal about standing here in a deserted handball court, both of us smelling of sweat, with something between us that concerned Mary. Talk of her was out of place in this court.

"You'll go down," he said. "You can bet that, Joe, as you and your friends say." I knew who my friends meant. "You'll go down and out and never come back." He pressed his lips together and breathed deep, exhaling through his nose. "I don't want to lose my temper with you, boy," he said. "I just want to tell you straight, so you'll understand."

"Understand what?" I was cold, the sweat cold on my back.

"Understand this, that you are not in our league, Joe. We don't know about people like you, our family. We don't understand people like you, Joe. *You*, do you get me, just you.

"I brought you up here to lick you, and I did. I'm twenty-five years older than you, and I licked you playing with your rules, the way you play."

"Those aren't my rules." I saw the veins in his legs and they looked obscene, as did we now, standing here.

"They are," he shouted. "You bet they are. You don't know anything but cutting corners and angles and lying and cheating and dishonesty. You live that way, do you get me, your life is predicated on such conduct, but not with me. Not with me, and not with my daughter, curse your dirty, rotten soul. You've almost ruined that girl, do you know that, boy? Do you?"

"I wanted you up here. I can beat you fair and square, right here or on your court or anywhere you say, but I wanted you up here. This is the last time you touch the Simpson family, boy, and I wanted you to lose. You're through with the Simpson family, boy, and whenever

you think of it don't comfort yourself with that Jewish alibi. It is nothing but an alibi.

"You've lied to that girl. You've cheated her. You've cheated us, Mrs. Simpson and me. We've tried so hard for you, boy, made allowances, explained behavior away. For what? Damn you, boy, for what? So that you could lie to us again and keep that poor, unfortunate girl in her room crying?

"We've said nothing of your conduct, Mrs. Simpson and me. We've said nothing to Mary. What have you to hide behind, damn you? Aren't we good enough for you, is that it? Aren't we Christian enough? Shut up! It can't be that you're Jewish. What in the hell is the matter with you? We've made concessions, too; we didn't plan for our daughter to fall in love with a Jew, but when she did, fine. We've had you in our home. We've fed you and slept you and asked you to be our guest. Mrs. Simpson has sat with Mary by the hour asking her what has happened. Those two have schemed and planned to get you, boy. Curse you, I hope you're paid for what you've done."

His face was full red now and he was shouting. "Do you think I don't know that you've slept with Mary? Do you think I don't know about the cabins near Mendota and our own house when we were gone? Do you think I don't know about the breaks you've caused?"

He calmed down a little. "That would be all right. Maybe, boy, I could understand that also, but you're using her, damn you. You don't intend to marry that girl. Why? Why?"

"I do, sir."

"No, you don't. You don't or you would have. I can understand it that you're Jewish and your religion or your family holds you back. Then why don't you leave her alone? Why don't you for God's sake be humane enough to leave the city or hang up when she calls? I know a little about love, you know, boy. If you can't marry her, then why don't you leave her alone?"

"I can't," I confessed.

He stepped back from me, turned to pick up his balls, his key, and then moved toward me once again. "Yes," he nodded, "yes, you can, boy. You're going to. I'll ask you one thing: Are you thinking of marrying her?"

"Of course."

"When?"

"Well, cripes, I don't know, sir."

I could hear him breathing. Then: "I should not have blackened myself to ask. Now, you hear me, boy, and hear me good: You will not see her. You will hang up if she calls, for I know she can promise me she won't and then do it anyway, from a hundred drugstores in St. Paul. You will stay away from her, because maybe I'll kill you if you don't. If I hear that girl crying again or I see her downstairs in the dark at three in the morning, smoking and sitting paralyzed, then maybe I'll get a gun and kill you."

I reached for the door, but he put his hand on my wrist and pulled it toward him, so I was close up. "Did you hear me?" he demanded.

"All right," I said.

"Not all right. Just remember, boy, stay away from her.

You want nothing, for some damn reason, but to ruin her, and I'll ruin you first. Now open that door." He bent to walk through and slammed it shut behind him.

I sat on a bench outside the court for a while and then walked down the three flights of stairs to the locker room. He was just getting out of the shower when I came in. He looked at me as though he'd never seen me before, stepping aside to let me come through. I paused for a moment, hoping he'd shake hands, but he just walked out.

For the rest of that year I saw Mary by appointment. She'd call the office and I'd pick her up somewhere around town. We'd leave her car there and ride into the country. Then when I brought her back I'd follow her in my car within a block or two of her house.

I'd promised my family and she'd promised hers. Until that final breakup before we got married, that was the manner of our relationship, and I couldn't quit even then. I haven't played handball since that day, though. I tried once at the Y, but he was in the court with me. I took my gloves and balls home and left them in a drawer.

The sun was up above North St. Paul now, behind the cabin, and the trees bordering our place wrapped their branches around the rays, tucking them

into the leaves and hiding them from me. After I'd changed into clean clothes there was just nothing else to do. I guess five rooms and a porch can become as small as a jail cell. I went from room to room, running my fingers over furniture, stopping for a minute in our bedroom to look through a magazine, then moving impatiently to the kitchen, drinking some milk from the bottle in a secret triumph. She hated me to do it. I wet a mop, wrung it out, and pushed it over the floor of the bathroom. In the kitchen once more, I found an orange, peeled it carefully, and went out into the back yard of the cabin to deposit the rind in the garbage can.

I started to rake the yard, threw the rake away from me, and went back inside the cabin. I could miss this woman so completely in a few hours that it was an actual physical ache.

There was no difference in the amount of time involved when we were apart with something wrong between us. A day or two days or a week, those times almost four years gone now and never forgotten, they had always been the same. I could be angry with her, curse her, curse her family and all Gentiles and myself, but in the end I had always wanted her and I didn't care what came of it.

I was lucky there. Mary was Mary. A good, honest, fine woman. She could have been a whore and it wouldn't have made a damned bit of difference. She could have been a thief, a drunk, a dope addict.

I knew a detective, Mike Sandstrom, who caught his wife in bed. In *bed!* I know the dick who was with him. Mike brought along his own witnesses. He divorced her

and he never saw her, but he never married either, and I know he stayed stuck for her. You don't show legal briefs to your heart and court decisions. .

I remember last summer a fellow name of Harry Kearns in the city clerk's office went to a month's National Guard training at Camp Ripley. I'd always known his wife was a bum, but she was careful and it was nobody's business but hers and Harry's. She wasn't careful when he was gone. I saw her on the town almost every night when I went to lunch. She played the field. Everybody who wanted got to her.

Then the word rode around the town, and the stories I heard were all bad and the guys who told them had no reason to lie. Harry got back to town and three of his pals went to him. They gave it to him straight and they told him all of it. They talked to him most of one night in the back room of a saloon downtown. They took him to hotel clerks and made him listen. He was almost beside himself and he thanked his pals and swore he'd throw her out. They told him they'd get some of the men for witnesses, it was that sure, and they drove him home in the morning to get rid of her. He called in sick for three days and on Sunday evening somebody saw him coming out of a movie on Grand Avenue with his wife. She's his wife still.

The porch was no better than the rest of the place. I walked out into the road and across over to our dock. We'd built it ourselves, both of us diving to get the two-by-fours down into the mud. I saw a piece of linoleum loose and went back into the kitchen for a hammer. I

changed my mind about that too and dropped it onto a chair on the porch and walked out on the dock once more, ripping the linoleum free, leaving a bare space of wood. These were protests, drinking the milk from the bottle and ripping the linoleum so she would see it and I'd wait for some word and give it to her good when she talked about it.

I flopped into the rowboat and reached out for the oars. I thought maybe if I went away from the cabin for an hour or more, maybe she'd be back, maybe I wouldn't be listening for the door, for pebbles being kicked on the road, for any clue to her approach. I hauled in the number-five can of cement we used for an anchor and then, sitting in the boat, took another half hour to get every cubic inch of water out. And with every scoop of the can I had to look down the road to see if she was coming.

I shoved off from the dock and let the boat drift for a few minutes, then bent to the oars, sending the craft forward in spurts. I rowed for maybe ten minutes before I shipped the oars and moved back to the stern, stretching my legs and letting my left hand trail in the water. I was remembering that last year before we were married.

"This isn't love," she said once. We were sitting on the stone bench in the short strip of park fronting on the river at Kellogg Boulevard.

"What do you call it, baby?" I asked. We'd met downtown for a movie, but one didn't please me, two others didn't please her, and in our minds, I knew, was a strong, unreasonable animosity toward the other that had begun to occur recently whenever one of us voiced any sort of

mild objection to projected plans. We'd walked through the Loop silently, me holding her hand, but both of us alone and as far away from the other as though we were in two states.

We walked down Wabasha to Kellogg and then, almost as though by design, turned toward the benches along the river. We smoked in silence and suddenly she had said it.

"What do you call it, baby?" She was looking out across the river toward the lights of Riverview. "How do you call it?"

"You don't love me." She crossed her legs as she turned her face to me, her hands in her coat pockets. "Sometimes I think, Joe, that you want to make me crazy."

"Oh, cut it out." Usually I was completely aware of the deal I was giving her, no matter what her complaint and no matter whether she was right or wrong. This time I'd had enough.

"You cut it out," she said. "You, Joe, you." Her lips were curved and there was a deliberate sneer on her face.

"All right. Start an argument," I said. "Come downtown for a movie and you have to start an argument."

"You don't love me at all," she repeated. "And I wish to God I didn't love you."

"I got no mortgage on you. If I don't love you, if you think I don't love you, then you're a fool."

"You know, Joe," she said. "We depend on each other, that's what's holding us, we depend on each other so much that we can't get along alone."

"Mary, cut it out."

"Cut *me* out, Joe," she said.

"Mary, will you stop?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll stop, Joe. One of these days I'll stop with you too."

"Baby, you don't have to give me two weeks' notice, you know. You want out, then take out. Right now, if you want."

"Don't shout at me."

"Oh, for God's sake, dear, I'm not shouting."

She was silent for a moment. Then: "Why, Joe? Why?"

"Why, what?"

That sneer once more. "You know what. You know damn well what, goddam you, Joe."

"I'm going to walk away from here," I warned.

"Goddam you, Joe."

"Mary." I got up and stood looking down at her. "Mary, stop it or you'll take a trolley home alone. I don't have to take this crap."

She reached out and got my arm, pulling me gently down beside her. Holding my hand, she looked square into my eyes. "Joe, please, why can't we be married?"

"We will, darling."

"When, Joe? When?"

"Mary."

"Don't you know what's happening, Joe?" she asked.

"What?"

"Don't you know I want to get married, Joe? Don't you know a woman *has* to be married? Don't you know I want children, Joe? Don't you know I just want to be married and have a home or an apartment or a room or a tourist cabin? Don't you know, Joe? Don't you?"

"Of course, dear."

"Don't you know what your family is doing, Joe? Don't you know what they're doing? Don't you know they're killing you, Joe, and me with you?"

"Mary." I'd let them take the onus for three years now.

"Damn them," she said. "Curse them," she said. "Curse them and curse you and the day I saw you, Joe."

"That's enough," I said. I got up and walked down toward Robert Street. I walked slowly for a block, then turned and saw her still sitting there. I came back just as slow and sat down beside her. "Give me a cigarette, Joe," she said matter-of-factly.

"All right, darling."

She smiled ruefully. "I give you a bad time, don't I, Joe-boy?"

"I give you a bad time, Mar'." She took my hand and squeezed it and brought it to her lips and kissed each finger. I put my arm around her and she let her head fall back against it, looking up at the sky.

"We'll get married, Joe, won't we?" she asked. She sat up and looked at me, nodding her head as she spoke. "Won't we, Joe, won't we?"

"Sure." I never believed it.

"We have to, you know," she said.

"I know."

"Joe, I'm so full of you and need you. I couldn't live with anyone else, Joe. I'd think it a sin, do you know that, Joe? I'd think it was wrong and that I was cheating God if I lived with anyone else, Joe."

"Mary."

"I love you, darling, and you can't be angry with me when I talk as I did. You can't, Joe, because I just can't help it any more. It's been so long." She nodded her head again. "I've waited so long, darling, and sometimes I get so sad, and sometimes I hate you. Do you know that, Joe?"

"Yes, baby, I know it."

"Let me tell you, darling. Don't be angry." She put her fingers over my mouth as though to quiet me if I talked. "I hate you sometimes because I've waited so long, Joe."

"I know."

"Joe, it's terrible. All my friends and they all know I'm in love with you. They're all married now, darling. Do you know how many times I've been maid of honor, Joe? I guess I'm the champion maid of honor in Minnesota, Joe. In the United States. Joe, it's so terrible. Joe, couldn't we go away? Just away and you get a job and I get a job?"

"Your family, darling."

She pulled herself free of me and sat on the edge of the bench. "Oh no, Joe," she said. "Not my family. I don't care about my family. I'll leave my family tonight, Joe, right now, I'll leave them this minute. You're more important than my family, Joe, and you know it. Not my family, Joe-boy, *your* family. You're the one, Joe, and you know it. You and your goddam family. You and your allegiance. My God, I fell in love with a man, didn't I? I sure did, didn't I, some man. Well, you and your family can go to hell, Joe, do you hear me? Both of you to hell." I put my arms around her and pulled her back on the

bench, holding her thus as she cursed me and fought me and slowly quieted down and stopped fighting and was sitting still against me.

"Mary," I said. "Mar'. Mary. Please, baby, don't do it to yourself."

"Don't do it to myself," she said.

"Stop, Mary."

"Stop, Mary," she said.

"Let's walk."

"Let's walk," she said. She stood up suddenly. "Let's walk," she said.

I took her arm as we started down toward Robert Street and then over the bridge. She was quiet then, her fingers twisted between mine, neither of us talking. This is what had become of us, I thought. This fighting, this shouting, these denunciations and threats and curses. Two months since I'd done more than kiss her good night. It wasn't right, she said. Making love was cheating, she said, it was low and vulgar because we weren't married. I'd reminded her that we hadn't been married a couple of years ago either, but she said then that she'd thought we were going to be married immediately, the most important thing in the world was to hold me then and for me to hold her, but now it seemed wrong for her somehow.

I didn't press that either. I wanted to go to bed with another woman, with any woman, and I couldn't, just couldn't bring myself to do it. On those nights when we'd quarrel, when she didn't want to see me or I her, I'd get a date somewhere and drink and dance, but when the evening had finished, and the woman I was with expected

to go to bed, I could not bring myself even to make love to her, not even to kiss her. I just saw Mary then.

In such a pattern was our last year before the marriage finished. Always an argument, always the bitter fights, the words said both of us regretted as they were spoken. I hit her that last year, when she called my mother a bitch. She hit me, striking me with her purse, breaking my glasses and raising an egg over my eye. I ran from her that time, determined that I would die before I saw her again. We had been sitting on a wall at the Macalester College campus and the fight began then because she had dated another man. I said what I shouldn't have and she swore at me and then, as I answered her in kind, swung at me with the purse. I found a taxi and was driven to City Hospital where the interns ribbed me and warned me to duck while they looked for glass. There was none, but they took two stitches in the skin above my eye.

When I walked out into the court abutting on the emergency room, she was waiting, standing against the wall, her car parked in the street.

It seems to me now, sitting here in the boat and remembering those months, that we had survived more fights, more scenes, more viciousness, unintended or planned, than most people do in a lifetime of marriage.

In that last year it was a rare evening when we did not exchange hard words once during the course of it. There was a compulsion among us to bruise ourselves, as though we were masochists enjoying the scenes and the outright brutality we subjected ourselves to.

My family was on me all the time. I moved to the Y for a week, and then one Sunday night, maybe eight days after I'd checked out of the house, I came into the lobby and saw the old man sitting there. He followed me into the elevator. "You come home, Joe," he said.

"Leave me alone."

"While I alive, you be home, Joe, 'less you married. You married?"

"No."

"Home."

Phil helped. He could not sit in company with people, either at his job with the cosmetics firm where he was the chemist, or in his own apartment, or at his friends' homes, without baring the cross he carried.

I schemed in that last year, plotted. I evolved plans as intricate as military maneuvers in order to see her for an hour. The old man would follow me, and when I confronted him, cutting across a boulevard to get in his car, he would merely drive on, heading for the suburbs, not talking.

My aunts came to talk with me, my uncles. I know how they worked; they would sit with my mother in the kitchen, hearing her woes, and then one would volunteer to talk to me as though I were a drunk that was too far gone to help himself.

They'd invite me to their homes, dinner invitations that I couldn't pass up, and always an extra girl there for Joe, somebody past twenty-five who had made her junkets to both coasts in search of a man and, failing, had come home to work and hope.

One of them I dated after meeting her at the home of an uncle. I took her to dinner and she talked of the books she'd read, her subscriptions to the book clubs, and how the movies distorted novels. I wanted to spit in her eye; she was, honest to God, a caricature of every mocky I'd ever seen. She saw plays, that one, and had opinions; she was the enlightened type, this one, with her Kelly-green coat and the falsies covering inadequate breasts, and after the books I had to listen to her accounts of the trips: how much she had tipped the porters, what had happened on the train, how she hated New York, two weeks there and she hated it, and Los Angeles was such a phony town, and she was a strong Zionist. She was strong, all right, she had a forearm I would have been proud of.

Mary and I became such a *cause célèbre* that last year. There aren't too many Jews in that fix at the same time, and the community fell on us with panting delight. My dentist offered an opinion, my doctor. I could not get a haircut without hearing reference to Mary, all of them blandly asking if I still had the shikseh, as though she were a plaything, some bum I was laying. When I changed dentists it didn't help, there were others. My pals in the B'nai B'rith counseled against it, and those guys I'd been in A.Z.A. with said to marry her.

I saw a rabbi that last year, asking him for help, and he said for Mary to turn Jewish, and once I even broached the subject and she clung to it, wanting to, until I was sick of listening.

There were weeks when I talked to neither my mother

nor father, waking and gulping coffee and leaving, never coming home until they were asleep. Asleep? In bed, for I would hear them whispering as I undressed, and this infuriated me. I would hear Ma crying sometime, and the old man getting out of bed to sit in the front room, but I'd lay there still, and he never came into my room.

When I saw her mother or father on the street, I would try to duck out of the way, searching wildly in those seconds as they approached for a door. If I failed, I'd smile and say hello and they likewise, but always I'd need a drink afterwards and sometime for the rest of the day I'd be worthless. Bill knew, and in that year he never loaded me with big stories, keeping me busy with shorts and on rewrite where he could watch me.

One night in October I drove my Ford into the garage, closed the door tight, and sat behind the wheel wanting to commit suicide, but I couldn't. One night I walked to the High Bridge, maybe four miles, and stood leaning over the railing looking down at the water. One night I got the .38 Police Special the chief had given me and drove with it almost to Anoka before stopping on the highway shoulder and walking into a field, but I threw the gun away and drove home.

There was a period when I could not hold food on my stomach. I took two days besides my days off and went to Rochester for a checkup and there, when I was finished and sat in the office of my consulting doctor, I finally let myself come apart and between sobbing and smoking told him everything, all of it. He was a nice guy, fellow my age. He took off his white jacket and got into his

suit coat and we went for a walk through the town, while he talked quietly, pointing at the city's thousands of patients, diagnosing for me and in such fashion showing me how simple my trouble was when it stood under the noon sun against these people who were dying and knew they were dying and hoped for some help.

He took me into the medical museum across from the clinic and we walked through slowly. He told me about old man Mayo, the brothers' father, and what he'd done. We sat in the park and ate ice-cream cones and he admitted he was a psychiatrist. He said he could not help me, nor any other psychiatrist in the world, that I must help myself. He said either I married her or I didn't, he was not concerned with which way it went, but that I must decide. He said I could run away if I liked, try another town, or get drunk any night in the week, or lay a different woman every night. He said every person has his own pattern for forgetting and every pattern was permissible, but that I should decide. We sat in the park until dusk and then I drove him to his home near the tourist cabins along the main highway. He got out and shut the door and stood against it looking in at me. "Joe," he said. I'll never forget this. "My name was Cohen once. Jake Cohen, not Jack."

I stared at him.

"It was, Joe," he said, smiling at me. "I married one, you know."

I stared at him.

"We have two children, Joe." He rapped twice on the door with his knuckles. "I'm quite happy," he said. "Very

happy," he said, and turned and walked away from me.

I drove home determined to marry her, but after dinner with my family that resolution had softened. In that year I decided to marry her a thousand times, and as frequently broke my promises to myself. I decided to quit a thousand times, and did not leave her once that I would not promise myself it was the end.

It became more and more difficult for me to eat. I could not sit through a full meal, couldn't bear to be still that long. I lived on sandwiches and coffee bought at lunch counters and soda fountains.

I could not remember things. If Ma asked me to get her something in the Loop, I forgot. I would go six weeks or two months without a haircut, until my family or Bill would remind me. At the office I worked mechanically, writing stories, sure, but maybe three times a week, reading the carbon of a short piece, I'd come across some absolutely irrelevant phrase in the story. If I wrote an address, it was Mary's or mine, or Bill's. If I wrote a name, it was apt to be the doctor's in Rochester, or whoever I was thinking of at that moment.

I took to sleeping all day, rising only in time to rush to the office. On my days off and on those nights that I couldn't see her I sat in the big chair in my room, smoking or reading, the door closed. Later I simply looked out of the window, too tired to move. I would not answer the telephone, and when my ma would scream at me I'd refuse invitations for the fights, for ball games, for swimming dates with fellows. I didn't have the interest to go through with it.

I lost twenty-six pounds that year. I didn't buy a suit, or a tie, or a pair of shoelaces. For some reason I took to bathing three and four times a day, laying in the tub for an hour at a time. I would stand before the mirror for half an hour using dental floss on my teeth and scrubbing and scrubbing them with the toothbrush. I would sit filing my nails until they would have roused the envy of a surgeon, or a hairdresser.

Then a month before I was married I got a note from Mary at the office. It said: "Joe, darling, I can't see you any more. We must stop, Joe-boy. Please, please, don't call me. I love you." She didn't sign it. I didn't call. I found some perverse satisfaction in being sunk. Thinking of it now, I guess that month was at last the first parcel of peace in years.

I had only to grieve for my loss then.

The boat was maybe two hundred yards offshore, straight out from the dock. I could see the cabin, framed by the elms we had left standing when we built the place, the wood looking darker in the shade of the trees, peaceful and inviting as a picture postcard.

Maybe she was all on the credit side before we were

married. She switched to the other side of the ledger afterward, though. There was as much red ink in her book as there was in mine now.

She'd wanted the cabin here, only twelve miles from town. No sense to a cabin, she'd said, three hundred miles up North where you have to drive two days coming and going for one night's sleep by gaslight. I asked her about the Club then. Forget it, she'd said, we don't need them. I've got you, Joe, she'd said, and you me. That's all we need.

We slept in army blankets one night, on the spot we'd picked for our fireplace. She'd said it herself. Cripes, I remembered the words. "Hell with all of them," she'd said. "You and me," she'd said. "That's all we need, Joe and Mary. We'll start our own religion. We'll have twenty-seven babies, fourteen boys and thirteen girls, and we'll start our own church. We can pray in the open here," she'd said.

Maybe she didn't think of that any more. Maybe the things you tell a woman and the things they tell you look out of place later, like white flannels and blue jackets in the sunlight.

We never prayed here. We didn't start any religion. We just dropped mine and neglected hers except when she wanted to go to church. She always went at Easter, and at Christmas I had to come too. She wasn't trying to convert me, she said, but it was so beautiful. Every year the same thing. Sitting with her and her parents, all three of them erect and smiling, and waiting for one of the parishioners to knock the chips off their shoulders with a crack about me.

That was being big about it, she said, broad-minded. She was willing to go to the synagogue, sure, any time I said, but it would be a cold day when I said. "We can't isolate ourselves," she said. Absolute. Of course we couldn't. We had to see her friends and her relatives and her family, and when I protested that I wouldn't take another churchgoing, another party with her patronizing friends, she'd cry, and that not helping, she'd reason with me, her beautiful eyes pleading until I put my arms around her and held her and said anything she wanted I'd do.

Except I never told her we'd have a baby. I never said kids at the table, and whenever she talked children I'd say wait. I thought of no excuses as I had with marriage, I offered no reasons. When she talked kids, I said wait, and that was the end of the speechmaking for a month. I didn't want a kid of mine marrying a Gentile and taking the rap I had, that's all. I didn't want it. He wouldn't even be a Jew. He wouldn't be nothing, not fish or fowl, or mineral or vegetable.

Preach me no sermons about the duty of man to propagate. This was my life, and if I'd chosen one way, I didn't want kids doing the same. I didn't want to populate the world with half-Jews taking raps for something they didn't even know existed. At least a Jew boy got it from the time he could walk. What the hell would my kid know about being a Jew, until some punk in grade school beat him over the head with sheeny? I'd gotten my orientation at home; I *knew* I was going to take lumps. What would he know?

Once I covered the speech of a nationally known trial lawyer who was talking at the Jewish Center. He said his kid—he'd married a Gentile—had come running to him when the lad was ten, crying because his pals had finally discovered his old man was kosher. He wanted to know what he was, the counselor told us, and then this guy recounted the scene.

He'd asked the kid who the finest woman in the world was. The boy answered his ma. The lawyer said he'd told the boy his ma was Irish. Then he got the kid to admit he thought pretty good of the old man too.

The lawyer asked the boy if the child remembered what they bought at the gate of the ball park before entering. The kid said ice cream. The lawyer asked him what kind, and the boy answered chocolate and vanilla.

The lawyer was triumphant. See, he told the kid, it's better than just vanilla, isn't it? It's better than just chocolate, isn't it? You've got the best of your mother, he told the boy, and whatever good there is in your old man. Whereupon, according to this amateur sociologist, the kid went back to his pals, confronted them with a double-decker ice-cream cone, and they played happily ever after.

It was a good speech story, and he raised some money for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, but it didn't help a half-breed in the land, and nobody will tell me different.

Besides, I didn't care about other people. I wasn't other people, I was me, Joe, and I knew what any kid of mine would get.

I guess if a Jew has any religion it's something akin to the old school try. If there is a ritual, then it consists of gefüllte fish and blintzes and salami and corned beef and the united front against encroachment. I guess if he has anything, it's a secure feeling of surviving after those centuries of getting his head beat against the walls of the world. I didn't want to spawn traitors, one turncoat named Joe was enough.

I could live without children. Mary was enough for me, and the way I figured it, I was, or should be, enough for her.

Then she fooled me. It's strange how one's fears change after marriage. I was worried always that Mary would become pregnant, and yet after our marriage, when I wanted a child not one whit more, it ceased to be a worry. I just wasn't concerned. When we were married Mary got a diaphragm, and that was the end of our worries.

Until a year and a half ago when one day, suddenly thinking that she had not sent me to the drugstore—she would never remember—I asked if it wasn't time.

We were out here at the cabin and I was going to drive into North St. Paul for groceries and some magazines and ice cream. She was sitting in the big chair near the fireplace, dwarfed by its size, and she didn't answer immediately. I asked her again. This was a woman who could not lie for long, especially when confronted with truth, and she lowered her head from me.

I laughed at her. "For God's sake, baby, you look as though you were pregnant."

She spoke to her shoes. "I am, Joe."

I was plotting almost as she finished talking, thinking of how to get out of this dilemma, remembering that the one thing I could not do was let her know that I wasn't glad to have a baby. If not glad, then certainly in accord. I knew so well what had happened and, even before she told me, guessed what she had done. I smiled and walked to her, bent to kiss her forehead.

She looked up at me. "Joe, we shouldn't be talking, maybe I shouldn't have told you. It's only two days, dear."

She could not have told me better news then. I crossed my fingers, and remembering the gesture now in the boat made me grimace at the horrible injustice I'd done her. So many grievous errors I'd made, so many really heinous deeds perpetrated against the poor girl.

"I'll get some at the drugstore just in case," I said soberly, praying she would need it when I returned.

"Yes, dear," she said. "You'd better. You know," she smiled, almost afraid to talk, "I haven't dared hope. But at night when you've been asleep I've wanted to tell you and thought you would be angry, and I'm still not sure, we're still not positive, are we, darling?"

I stood before her, knowing how much she wanted me to kneel and comfort her and hold her. I could not bring myself to do it. She had double-crossed me, damn it, and if I loved her in spite of her doing so, I did not have to make it easier for her. It was not, surely, easier for me. I felt so outraged, as though she had done a vile thing, and it was I who needed the comforting and the reas-

surance that it would be all right. Except I was determined there would be no child.

I was back from North St. Paul in an hour, and through the day—Wednesday—displayed what must have been magnificent play-acting, for I washed the dishes and cooked dinner and cleaned the cabin, not for any sophomoric fear of Mary's well-being as a prospective mother, but because she was upset and I could at least pretend I was happy.

Thursday after breakfast I told her I was driving into town for some books at the library and she gave me a list of chores. I said I'd be back for dinner and asked her if she might want to go into the village for a movie, but she was so wrought up with waiting for the worst—the best for me—that she seemed grateful I was leaving the cabin.

Driving into town, my mind galloped unchecked over the torturous roads of terror. I thought of driving her to Stillwater on that bumpy lane. I thought of going to the amusement park on the other side of the lake and taking her on the roller coaster. I thought of hot baths and castor oil and all the horrible trappings of unwanted pregnancy. I thought of what I'd tell her and how I'd tell her and what might happen. But I was secure in one thing: we were married; I was one of two votes in this partnership and I could outlast her, or so I thought.

I found Bill Bird in his basement, wearing pajama pants and tennis sneakers and canning pickles. Kay and three other women, with their children, were camping at Crab Lake some fifteen miles southeast of St. Paul.

It was an annual pilgrimage, and Bill always got a lot of work done when Kay was gone.

He looked up from the sink where the jars sat in boiling water. "You look like you need a drink," he said.

"I do." He made a move for the stairs but I held his arm. "Hell with it," I said. "I got troubles drink won't help."

"Yeah?" He fished a jar out of the water.

"Bill, this is confidential."

He looked up at me.

"Oh, for cripes' sake, I didn't mean that. I mean not even Kay."

"You know better, kid."

"All right, Kay, then, but, Bill—"

"Why don't you take that drink first?" he asked.

"No, listen, Bill. No. Bill, listen."

"I'm listening," he said, tightening the cap on the jar.

"Bill, I think Mary's pregnant."

"You damn fool." He turned from the jar. "If you ever come down here again and tell me you're in trouble because your wife is caught, I'll fix your wagon." He turned full, so he was facing me and looking at me. "Are you broke?" he asked.

"No."

He turned to the sink and fished out another jar. The smell of dill made my nose crinkle. "Bill, what am I going to do?" I asked. "Bill?"

I could see the muscles swelling in his arm as he held the contraption which turned the cap. He pressed with both arms, the sweat coming out on his forehead, and

I saw him brace one knee against the shelf leg as he strained for leverage. The cap turned very, very slowly, almost infinitesimally, but he wouldn't stop, and then suddenly the bottle burst, the cap shooting up in the air, the pickles falling over the shelf next to the sink, the water escaping in spurts, and both of us jumped back to escape being scalded. He held the contraption in his right hand and with the other he wiped his forehead. I was a little behind him and to his right. Then he turned to me and, seeing I was unhurt, he said: "Get out of here, Joe."

"Bill." This was the best friend I had, maybe the only friend. "Bill, for Pete's sake, Bill."

"Joe." He waved the contraption at me. "Get, Joe, don't talk with me now because I'll say something I don't want to say. Get out of here and stay away until you know what you're doing."

"Bill, what am I going to do?"

He told me. "You've been asking me for a long time, Joe. Me and your pa and your friends, always what are you going to do. If Kay was pregnant I'd find a doctor to take care of her. That's what you do."

"I can't."

Cripes, he was mad! "Get out of here!" he shouted. "Damn you, Joe, get out of here! Go to hell where you want to! Go to hell, because that's where you belong."

"Why do you get so mad?" I asked. "Why don't you let me tell you. Geez, you can't just holler at a guy without listening to his reasons."

"You haven't any reason," he said.

"I have too!"

He fished another jar out. "Joe, please, do me a favor, do yourself a favor." He was speaking quieter now. "Just go someplace, because there isn't a damn thing I can do for you. Why, God in heaven, kid, don't you know what you're doing? Do you want to kill that girl once and for all?"

I was mad at him then. I remembered leaving the house and driving back to the Loop, cursing him for being a fool and a turncoat, for not understanding, for remaining always a farmer. Now I seemed to shudder thinking of what I'd done that afternoon.

Doc Elias was no different from his prototype in your town. He was about forty-five, tall, with black hair, fat, and always beautifully tailored. He'd gotten an M.D. from Creighton in Omaha, taken graduate work at Northwestern, and then, after marrying a girl from Evanston, begun his practice in Kansas City, his home town. He was a very good man, but he was sorry for a girl, friend of his wife's. That's what he said. Maybe he got eager, maybe he had gambling debts, maybe he did for the girl himself and *had* to get her out of it. Anyway, his license went and he set up shop in St. Paul. He had a magnificent office, I'd played poker there at night often enough, and he was billed as a chiropractor. He was very careful, took nobody after they were two months along, and in that fashion made an awful lot of money with no chance whatever of anything going wrong.

He had as many doors as an analyst. He kept me waiting in a small cubicle for fifteen minutes and then came

in. He looked at me and laughed. "Cheating on that wife of yours, you must be out of your head, boy," he said.

"I haven't been cheating, Doc," I said.

He sobered up. "Little short of cash?"

"No."

He sat down on the examining table beside my chair, boosting himself up so that his legs swung free. "Doesn't she want it?" he asked.

"No," I lied. "I guess I don't either."

"I can let you have some money, Joe, if you're short. Hell, I'm a damn good croaker yet, I'll take care of her for nix. Let some punk deliver the child when it comes. She's a healthy-looking girl."

"NO!" I jumped from the chair. Why did everyone want me to have a baby? "NO!" I screamed. "NO!"

He got my shoulders and shoved me back in the chair. "All right," he said. "All right. How far along?"

"Three days."

"Well, hold it, boy. Maybe you better wait two or three weeks."

"What's the use of waiting? I know it's so."

"You don't know a damn thing," he said. "Nothing. None of you people know anything, but you all tell me you do. You all know so much," he said. "Well, you don't know anything."

I felt some better when I'd lit a cigarette. "Doc, this is crazy," I said. "I don't know what's happening to me. Give me something, remember who it's for, just to make her come around. Those easy pills, that won't hurt and won't leave anything, and are all right."

He shook his head, smiling all the while. "You guys and your easy stuff. Everything's so easy, isn't it, Joe?" There was a knock on the door and a beautiful mulatto woman in white slipped in and whispered in the doc's ear. "Let her wait," he said. "Just give her a magazine and let her sit there. She waited long enough to come see me. Her old man won't say hello to me anyhow, after it's done. He won't even pay me himself. Well, just let her sit," he said savagely. "If she'd sit up more, she wouldn't be here so often."

He turned to me after the woman had closed the door. "One of them from the Hill," he said. "Do you think my wife ever gets an invite to any of their houses? But they know my phone number when they want me, don't they?" He jabbed with his left hand, swinging his arm in the air. "Ah, what am I taking it out on you for?" he asked. "Joe, I'll give you something. Have her take two after dinner tonight, two more with a hot bath just before she goes to bed, and two more after the bath. Two in the morning after breakfast, ditto lunch, ditto dinner tomorrow. If that doesn't do it—" he slid off the table—"wait until next month and then you'll have to bring her in," he said. He saw the fright on my face and patted my shoulder. "Stronger than TNT," he assured me. "And a lot safer."

"You're sure."

"I'm sure, Joe." He reached for the doorknob. "I wish you'd let her have it, *if* she really is," he said.

"Maybe next year, Doc."

"You know what you're doing, kid," he said. "But I

don't put in with you, remember that. She's a good girl, that wife of yours. My wife says she's the best."

He left me in the room for a few minutes and came back with a white unmarked box as big as a cigarette pack. "Remember what I told you, Joe?" he asked.

I recited the dose for him. He nodded. "Let me hear what happens," he said, "and don't worry. For her, Joe, the best that's in me, and I'm pretty good, you know." He smiled as he shoved me ahead of him. "I'm pretty good, if I say so myself."

I walked around town getting the stuff on Mary's list. The pills weighed a hundred pounds in my pocket and I couldn't keep my hand off them. I'd make it up to her, though. I promised that. No matter what, I'd make it up to her. I drove down to the market and bought four bunches of gladioli from an open stand. I bought a box of candy. I bought a red leather bag in the most expensive specialty shop in town, using a blank check they gave me. I loved her so and wanted always to buy things for her. It wasn't as though I didn't love her, for I did. I loved her, and I didn't want to do this. All the time, driving and walking around town, I was trying to get a speech together to present to her, wondering what I'd say, hoping she wouldn't cry or scream or fight. There just wasn't going to be a baby, that's all.

I drove as slowly as I could going back to White Bear, letting cars and trucks pass me at will. I drove all around the lake before I had enough courage to head for the cabin.

She wasn't in the big room when I stepped in from the

porch. I wondered if she was fishing, and then, on an impulse, ran into the kitchen. I became a little frightened and shouted her name. She answered from the bedroom.

She had the covers thrown back and was lying atop two pillows, wearing a housecoat. She looked so sad, so woebegone, that the only reason I could attribute it to made me tingle all over, but I didn't dare hope.

She raised her arms to me and I knelt beside the bed, my head on her breast. "Oh, Joe," she whispered.

"It's all right, Mary. It's all right."

"Oh, Joe, I shouldn't have cheated. God got even with me for cheating," she said.

"Don't worry, baby." I kissed her forehead and her cheeks and her ears. "Don't worry." I stood up. "You wait here," I ordered. "Now don't you move, you. I've got a surprise. You won't move?"

She shook her head, biting her lip as a cramp tore at her. I got the flowers and the candy and the bag and brought them all in, throwing everything beside her. She held the flowers to her and then tasted the candy, and seemed to giggle like a child. Then she took her time, as she always did unwrapping gifts, and the bag made her gasp and squeal.

She fondled it, rubbing her hand over the red leather, and then she kissed me. Then she threw the bag from her so that it hit my bed and toppled to the floor. She pushed the flowers away from her and closed the candy and dropped it on the floor. She turned her back to me and, sobbing, said: "Joe, I want a baby. I want a baby, Joe."

"We'll have one," I said. "We'll have one, darling." I

kissed her hair. "I'll heat some soup," I said and left her. I wanted to get rid of those pills.

I rowed back to shore as though the cabin were burning. I ran the boat right up on the beach, letting the bottom scrape hard against the sand and pebbles. It seemed as though I was trying to hide from the thoughts which pushed themselves forward before me, old now and covered with shame, but confronting me with my guilt and lying and cheating. I jumped onto the beach, dragging the number-five can behind me; ran across the road, looking once to my right for a sight of our car; ran up the steps; ran through the big room; ran into the bathroom and pulled open the medicine-cabinet door; bolted into the tiny dressing room and pulled drawers open and found finally, lying in the corner of the drawer, the little circular container which held the diaphragm.

I ran out of the cabin, maybe looking crazy to anyone who watched, and across the road once more, out on the dock. I ran to the edge of the dock and stopped, panting and trembling, my thighs aching with the sudden exertion, and looked across the lake toward the Club.

Come on home, Mary, I said aloud. Please, come on home and stay home. Please, Mary, get in the car and come on home. Look what I got, Mary, look, here in my hand. Look what I got and come on home. Watch me, Mary, I said, and look close. Mary, watch me and see me and look what I'm doing.

I pulled my arm far back, as far as I could, my left hand covering the box as though it were a baseball, and I swung, letting the box go horizontally out of my hand so that it was caught by the wind and sent skimming out over the water. I saw it start to drop, and then it hit the water, skipped once, and sank below immediately.

See, Mary, I said. Come on home, Mary. Come on home, I said to myself now, and we'll have a baby. Damn it, come on, you want a baby, we'll have one, only please get away from those people and come home. I was as scared as I'd been the night by the river when she'd told me she was going to marry that lob from Fargo, but I knew I had to do something. I had to offer a trade, you see, and this was my trade.

I rejected an impulse to get in the boat and row to the spot where the box had dropped, and then, comforting myself, I admitted guiltily that she could always buy another, as though she were watching me now and had seen what I'd done.

Come on home, Mary, I said to myself, and we'll have a baby. I didn't want one, but she did, and if that would bring her back, then let us have the baby. All right, then, I'd raise a goy and let him marry a goy, or her, but just

come home, Mary, and don't stay over there and let's stop this craziness and have dinner.

I wanted to pray as I turned back toward the cabin, but I knew I wouldn't. I have always had my own theories on praying, and it seems to me that asking for help when you never, at any other time, think of God is unfair, and He won't listen anyway.

The sun had dropped until it was level with the top of our chimney and a stillness surrounded the cabin now, disturbed only by crickets and the lapping of the water, which was more frightening than black darkness and more enveloping than the loudest noises of the city. I walked slowly across the road and into the cabin and thought maybe I'd start dinner for us and set the table and get some linen out, so that when she came everything would be ready.

I walked into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, and, bending to look for food, I became weak. I realized suddenly that maybe she meant it, maybe she wouldn't be home, and for the first time belligerence didn't help, and hoping didn't help, and praying wouldn't help.

I was terrified, with a dread stronger than anything I'd ever experienced, for I knew I could not lose her, the one thing I could not do, ever, was let her go.

I had to lie down suddenly. I walked through the short hall to our bedroom, noticing for the first time the basque shirt and clean, faded dungarees she'd laid out for me on my bed. This was to be my costume for the bazaar, and I flopped down on her bed, feeling myself going completely to pieces, unable to hold myself in any longer.

I wanted to scream, to yell, to plead for help from someone, and I knew there was nothing to help. These were her terms now. I had to go to the bazaar, and while I knew I wouldn't, for the first time I believed she might mean what she had said.

She was writing the contract now, and lying there, my hands holding the sides of the mattress, didn't I have to admit it was her turn? Hadn't I made the rules long enough?

Lying there on her bed, looking at the blank ceiling, I remembered coming home two days after I told my family I was married. I walked in early one morning resolved not to talk with ma, but she'd left the back door open, as always. I don't know yet where she'd gone. I moved swiftly, getting all my clothes together. I had parked the Ford in the alley, and I made three trips. First with clothes, then with bulkier possessions—skates and balls, my skis—and then the books which I threw in the back seat. I wasn't there more than half an hour and I didn't see her. I left a note saying that I'd gotten my stuff and left.

I didn't see any of my family for more than a year.

Once I passed Phil on the street, but he looked right through me, his lips curling in a sneer, and I stifled the need to smash his face, getting a picture of the scrap, people gathering and him screaming, and maybe a cop I didn't know dragging us up to Headquarters. I walked past him, nodding, and said, "Hello, Phil," because I couldn't stop from saying it.

That was the only sight of my family for almost fourteen months. Mary and I found an apartment on Grand Avenue, near Cretin, maybe two miles from my family and a mile from hers. We saw her parents frequently, mostly for dinner at either their home or our apartment, and on special occasions we took them to a restaurant.

Then one Sunday night I was sitting on rewrite next to Bill. We'd both come in early, and Mary was with Kay, helping her with the spaghetti we'd have when we got there. There was an awful lot of small, inconsequential stuff going into the paper that night and I was quite busy. Bill called to me a couple of times, but I was intent on an accident story that a stringer of ours had phoned in from outside of Mankato and I didn't look up from the machine until he said sharply: "Joel"

He was bent over the desk, his head thrust forward, so that when he spoke nobody but me heard him. "You got a caller, Joe," he said.

I looked toward the reception room, saw nobody, and looked back at Bill. He was motioning to his side with his thumb, and I followed the gesture. Pa was standing there, for all I know in the exact spot where Mary had waited that first night.

There was a great sinking in my stomach and I could feel the bottom of my spine, below there, you know, pulling together. He looked as frightened as I did, there was no color in his face, and I saw immediately that he had aged terribly since I'd seen him. He was clean-shaven—I noticed that as I walked toward him—and he wore a tiepin which pulled the collar forward from his neck so that I saw the skin of his neck, lying loose and wrinkled.

He'd always paid one hundred dollars for his suits, and now he wore a brown double-breasted sharkskin. He was a little more bald, his hair barely covering the scalp now, but combed straight as always. I wanted to put my arms about him and put my head in his shoulder and hold him and say hello, Pa, how are you, Pa, thank God you came here, Pa.

"Ma will fix you for this," I said, smiling. I extended my hand, and he took it, running his thumb over the top of my hand.

"You thin, Joe," he said.

"No. Cripes, I've put on weight," I said.

"Good. She feed you good, yes?"

I nodded.

"Good. I'm glad." He let go my hand and we stood facing each other, the wooden barrier between us. "How you are, Joe? All right?"

I nodded. "I'm all right, Pa. Honest."

"Happy, Joe?" He cocked his head. "Truth, Joe, you happy?"

"I'm happy, sure."

"Honest and true, happy?"

"Honest."

"Well." He nodded, gulping. "If you happy, is good."

"I'm happy," I said.

He raised his hand. "'Allo, Bill," he said loudly. I turned to watch Bill raise his hand in greeting and then point to the desk with his pencil, indicating he was busy. Pa looked at me. "Maybe you got few minutes, Joe, we sit down?" he said.

"What do you mean, few minutes?" I asked. "When haven't I got time for my own father?"

"Year now," he said. We came into the reception room on opposite sides of the barrier and sat down at chairs flanking the small desk used to handle the screwballs who came in with plans to save the world. "Year already you haven't got time for father," he said.

"Did you have time for me? Did Phil have time to say hello when he passed me on the street?"

"Phil's a pautz," he confided. "'Tween me and you, Joe, nobody should know, Phil is a big pautz." We both laughed at that.

"How's Ma?" I asked. I lit his cigarette and mine and noticed his hand shook a little.

"Ma is Ma, Joe. Cries for you." He nodded. "Cries for you, I can't stop her."

"Shouldn't cry," I said, my throat full suddenly.

He gestured with the cigarette. "Shouldn't cry," he repeated. "Shouldn't cry," he said. "You got here in office rules for peoples, Joe, if to cry or not?"

"All right," I said.

"You her own kit," he said, "come from her, Joe, got her milk in you, Joe. She going to cry till she dies."

"All right."

"She can't help," he said. "What you did, she can't help, and what she swear, curse you in Jewish, she don't mean and can't help. If she say you should die, she wants herself die 'stead of you, Joe, and if she scream she hate you, she lies, because she can't hate even if she want."

"Yeah."

We were both silent, and I saw, with such sadness as I had never felt, that his hand shook not from the excitement his visit brought on but from age now.

"Your wife, Joe. How's she?"

"Fine," I nodded. "Fine."

"She's happy too with this arrangements?"

"She's happy, Pa."

"Joe." He stepped on his cigarette. "Joe, I wouldn't lie, not now." He reached out and held my wrist, running his thumb over the hair. "Can't stand no more not see you, Joe."

I wanted to cry.

"Can't stand no more." He shook his head. "Can't sleep no more think of you, Joe. Can't work, think of you. No good this kind of life, not see you, Joe. I don't want no more this kind of life, you and me not friends."

"We're friends, Pa."

"I'm friends with man in Russia, Petroff, you heard me talk from him, we grow up together. Friends with him too, but didn't see him thirty years already and I'm all right. You and me not that kind friends, Joe."

"Yes, Pa."

"I'm too old, Joe, I should change now, you understand me? I like Phil, sure, Ma, sure. Joe, a year vacation is enough. You'll come for supper Friday, Joe."

"Ma?"

"My house too, kit, not Ma's. I'm paying rent yet. I'm buying food there yet, kit, not Ma. I'm too old, kit, for new kinds pleasures. My pleasures is Joe, I want him by my table."

"I'm married, Pa."

"Bring her, Joe. Why not? Bring her."

"You'll have to ask her, Pa."

He shook his head. "Next time I ask. Be satisfied, kit, I'm here, no? Get even with who you want, not with old man. I come to you or you come to me, Joe?"

I was silent.

He reached out and let his fingers drag over my face. "I'm not specialist in society, Joe, how you ask, who you ask. I come ask my son to eat with me, be satisfied."

"All right, Pa. Sure, we'll come."

He rose, using his elbows to shove up on his pants. "Nu," he said, "is settled. I'll buy scotch, how you drink it God knows. You and Phil with scotch, big shots, both," he joked.

I stood up with him. "Pa."

"Nu?"

"Thanks, Pa," I said.

He rubbed my head, then suddenly, looking first to the city desk, he pushed me forward, kissed the top of my head, and then pushed me gently from him. "You and

me," he said, "you and me, Joe, can't be mad. Can't be, that's all."

"No."

He shook his head, grinning now. "You a sonofabitch, Joe," he said.

"You know what that means?" I asked.

"Know what that means," he scoffed. "I'm citizen twenty years, this snot asks me if I know English. I'm Mason fifteen years, he ask if I know what it means. I say you a sonofabitch, Joe, I know what I mean. You a sonofabitch."

"You're crazy." It was like getting in your own bed after being caught in the rain. "You're honest to Christ crazy."

"Honest to Christ," he repeated. "Nu," he shrugged, "is America. Here you got to swear for Christ."

"What's the matter?" I joked. "He was Jewish, wasn't he?"

"Jewish," the old man nodded. "That's his big mistake. If he not Jewish, he live a long time longer."

Bill came out and held his hand to the old man. "Bill," the old man said, "you fat like a pig, honest, you should be ashamed."

"I'm ashamed." Bill grinned.

"How's he?" The old man cocked his head at me. "All right, does his work?"

"No complaints," Bill said.

"Well." The old man hitched his trousers again. "No complaints is good. You busy mans here, I'll go. All big-shot newspapermans here, no room for old bastard like

me. Joe"—he looked over Bill's shoulder—"Friday, sure?"
I nodded.

"Joe, watch the desk," Bill said. "I'm going to smoke with the old man."

"You hear him, Joe?" the old man asked. "Is the boss here, that Bill."

I walked to the desk, a happy, almost unbearable glow inside me that I could not check. I wanted to call Mary, but decided I'd tell her when I could watch her face. She'd be so pleased.

Bill had fixed it so I worked Tuesday and got the Friday man to work for me then. Mary hadn't given me a minute to forget Friday. She spent one day shopping, everything new, tops to bottom. Everything. Tuesday she went to the library and sat there all day reading about Jewish food and the protocol involved in Sabbath dinners. Nights she asked me so many questions about the Sabbath that I wanted to run from her. She was so excited.

Friday when I woke she was gone, leaving me a note. She'd gone to the beauty parlor.

I got the apartment cleaned and fell asleep on the couch. She was just wild when she came home. She'd gotten a permanent. She didn't like the hat she'd bought Monday, so she'd gotten another one. Red. And red shoes. And gloves to match. She had the suit picked out that I was going to wear, and the shirt, *and* she'd bought me a tie to wear. She was absolutely breathless with excitement.

Driving down Grand Avenue, she had her hand on my

knee, squeezing so that it ached. "Take it easy, baby," I said.

"Joe, I'm so scared."

I leaned over to kiss her ear. "Are you nuts? You're the most talented, the most charming, the most beautiful, the loveliest woman in Christendom. What are you scared about?"

"Your family."

"They'll love you," I said. And I meant it. Holy smokes, how could they not love her? She'd wanted to meet them for so long, planned so this week, worried so about them. She was so anxious to please them, and I felt so happy watching her and thinking that now everything was going to be all right. Now we were going home to my family, and the good days, the really good days, were beginning. Wait till the old man saw her legs.

"I hope so," she said. "Oh, Joe, I hope so." She was quiet for two blocks. "Joe. Joe," she said, "you won't let them hurt me, darling?"

"Hurt you?" I turned to look at her. "How can they hurt you, darling?"

"Oh, darling, don't be angry with me, please, but don't let them say anything wrong, will you?"

"Mary, this is my family. For cripes' sake, we're married, dear. Nobody's going to hurt you; why—why, they'll love you from the time they see you."

"I hope so," she said. "I hope so," she whispered. "Oh, I hope so," she whispered.

The lights were on throughout the house, and I saw Phil's car, the coupé his father-in-law had given him when

he married, standing at the curb. I was held in a nameless fear for an instant when we stopped, but then jumped out of the Ford and came around the other side to get Mary.

Mr. Robbins, the old, pious Jew in the apartment next door, was coming from the synagogue, and as we came up the walk from the curb to the sidewalk he stopped and squinted at me. "Joe, a *gutt Shabes*," he said, looking at Mary, staring at her in a rude, offensive manner.

"Hello, Mr. Robbins," I said. "Mary"—I took her arm—"this is Mr. Robbins, an old friend. My wife," I said.

He shook her hand. "'Allo," he said. "'Allo," holding her hand, "gled to know you," still peering at her, until she seemed to shrink from his eyes.

I took her arm once more and got her away from him. "I hear a lot from you," he told her. She nodded, smiling, afraid to talk, afraid of him. "I hear a lot from you," he repeated.

"We've got to get in, Mr. Robbins. We're late. Say hello to your wife."

He nodded, smiling that silly grin, half knowing, half lascivious, that only an old, vulgar, uncouth, ignorant Jew could perfect.

"Dirty, crummy bastard," I said as we walked to the house.

"He was nice, Joe," Mary said, but she was frightened now, worried about the evening to come. She pulled at her dress.

Pa was at the door, holding the screen open. He wore slacks and a sport shirt. He held out both hands to Mary.

"My God, fah God's sake," he said, "you a beautiful girl, what you want with that damn fool?" he asked.

"He's cute," she said, giving him her hands. He drew her into the house and I followed.

"I'm glad you come," he said, taking her coat. "Believe me, I'm glad you come. Mary," he added.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm glad too."

He looked at her in the light and shook his head. "By golly, that Joe find him such a woman, I don't know."

She blushed, but she was very pleased. She waited for me to get out of my coat, holding my arm. Pa put the coats away, and Phil got up from the couch finally and came toward us. "Phil," I said, holding out my hand.

"Joe." He was going to be polite, but no more.

"Mary, this is my brother."

"I'm pleased to meet you," he said.

"Hello, Phil." How much better she was at this, how much nicer than we.

We stood there for a minute or two, none of us knowing what to do. "Where's Ma?" I asked. "And Helen?"

"In the kitchen," Pa said. "You know Ma how she cooks, for fifty people she cooks there." He rubbed his hands. "Phil, shut the door. Nu, a drink." He took Mary's arm. "You take a drink, a small one, yes?"

"A small one," she said. "I'm not very good at drinking."

"Fine," he nodded. "Fine. That Joe he makes up for you, still drinks, that Joe?"

She nodded. "A little."

The old man had set up a bar on the sideboard in the dining room. There was the scotch and some bourbon,

and ice in a casserole dish, and a quart of soda and one of ginger ale.

"Nu, Joe," he ordered. "Fix up. You the specialist in that."

"Soda, dear?" I asked Mary. She nodded, staying at my elbow, seeming to huddle near me. Phil leaned against the sideboard in what he must have thought was a non-chalant, man-about-town attitude.

We stood around with our glasses, each waiting for someone to offer a toast, each aware there was a degree of solemnity in the moment, and then Mary raised her glass a few inches and said: "Would you all drink to love, and—and to happiness for our loved ones."

"Nice," the old man said. "By golly is nice. Sure, that's a girl, Mary. You a good girl, Mary."

We emptied our glasses, everyone drinking the whisky neat, and the old man poured water for chasers. Then there was another silence, and the old man said: "Nu, come let's sit down. I want to sit with Mary. By golly, old man like me, find a young womans, he wants to sit with her a little, no, Mary?"

"Of course," she smiled. "But you don't look old, sir."

He waved his hand at her. "I'm too old, know too much, *see* too much," he said.

We moved back into the living room as I wondered whether Ma intended to stay in the kitchen the rest of the night, appearing maybe with each course and then disappearing. And Helen, why didn't she come out?

"How's Helen?" I asked Phil. He'd chosen the chair on

the far side of the room, next to the piano, his legs crossed, his hands together before his lips.

He nodded slowly, posing for ads all the time. "Swell," he said. "She's fine."

I turned to Pa, sitting on the couch next to Mary. I was huddled up on the footstool beside her. "How's Ma been feeling?" I'd be damned if I'd go out in the kitchen and leave her here alone.

"You know Ma," the old man said. "Sometimes good, sometimes bad."

"Yeah." There was another silence, and then suddenly I saw the old man look toward the kitchen and I followed his eyes to see Ma and Helen coming toward us, my sister-in-law holding her arm as though they were walking to a grave.

Mary and I stood, then Phil, watching us, got to his feet. Ma's face was set in a smile which was visibly aching her. They stopped under the arch that connected the dining room, and I said: "Ma, this is Mary."

I felt Mary squeezing my fingers just before she dropped my hand and walked forward, her arms outstretched. She didn't give Ma a chance, but smiled and said: "I'm so glad to know you," and kissed her cheek. Ma kept the smile and nodded.

"I'm happy I should know you," she said. There was no welcome in her voice, nor did she utter a word of welcome to her house.

"Hello, Helen," Mary said. "I've heard so much about you, I feel as though I know you."

"Me too," Helen said.

I came up behind Mary and put my arms about her. I wanted to shield her from these people, and I had never felt more protective.

"You haven't got a kiss for your mother," Ma said.

"Sure," I smiled, and bent to kiss her cheek, but suddenly she clutched me to her, her arms about my neck, holding me so tight I was breathless for a minute and unable to move. "Still my son," she said. "Still my boy," she said, as though there were a plot there to steal me. "My boy, Joe. Hates the mother, hates the family, don't want to see the family, but my boy, Joe."

"Sure I am, Ma." I wanted to get loose, but couldn't, found myself helpless in her grasp. "I haven't got any other," I assured her.

She released her grip. "Seems Joe likes better by his in-laws than me," she told Mary.

"Ma!" I said.

"Well," she smiled. "You know, here is a poor, Jewish house, not fancy like some people. Joe liked fancy all the time, wants to forget his family."

I wanted to leave then and there. I'd hoped so for a joyous time, an honest, warm reconciliation, with bad words and bad scenes and bad times forgotten. I'd missed these people so, the old man and her and even Phil, I guess, and now it had resolved itself to the same needling.

"Nu." The old man was on his feet and had his arm about Ma. Helen stood with Phil, so that we were three separate groups as distinct from each other as though we were on a platform waiting for a train. "Nu, how long do we wait for food, till next year?"

"Come, Joe," he said. "Mary, come. I'll show you where to sit." He led us to the table, ignoring Phil and Helen and Ma, sat me down at his right and Mary next to me. "Sit," he said to them. "Sit now. I'm eating with my family, thanks God."

Helen and my mother disappeared in the kitchen, and Phil was remote at the opposite end of the table. "You really look a great deal like Joe," Mary said to him.

"That's what they tell me," he said, with an attempt at gaiety as flat as it could be.

"Both homely ones," the old man said. "None as good as me, huh, Mary?"

She laughed. "Absolutely not." She leaned over and whispered in my ear, "I like him."

Ma and Helen appeared with platters, and I was suddenly overwhelmed with shame, remembering the meals at the Simpsons' and the efficient way in which Mary's mother handled the table.

"Ma, Helen," I said, "can't you sit down? Cripes, it won't be much of a dinner with both of you gone."

"I'll help," Mary said. "Let me help."

"Thanks, no," Ma said as Helen walked triumphantly to the kitchen. "Is all right, you are a guest, you know."

That left nothing for Mary but to keep still. I wondered if the evening would be this way. We got through the fish all right, mostly in silence. The old man would try to start conversation, but it wasn't there, nobody would pick it up. I kept my hand on Mary's knee, for what comfort it would bring her, and when she could she put her hand over mine, holding it tight.

There was no dessert or coffee, in accord with the dietary laws.

We sat thus for a time, until the strained atmosphere of the room became almost unbearable, and then Pa, sensing it as I did, bade us all move into the living room.

Mary rose, picking up her dishes as she did so, but Ma said no. "Helen will help," she said.

"Oh, please, let me," Mary asked.

Ma had that set smile on her face once more. "No difference," she said. "Helen will help."

Mary set the dishes down slowly and smiled at Ma, then walked slowly into the living room.

We sat there for another half hour of almost continuous silence, and then Ma appeared with a bowl of fruit, setting it down on the coffee table and refusing to sit on the couch with Mary and me, but finding a seat on the piano stool. Pa was in the chair to our right, Helen sat on the arm of Phil's chair, and we two on the couch, as though she were a trophy I had brought home from abroad.

"You know," Mary said, speaking directly to Ma, "this is the first Jewish meal I've ever had."

"Well," Ma smiled, her arms folded over her chest, "Joe don't care much for his family. Never much the family for Joe," she said.

It seemed to me she was counter-punching as effectively as though she were in the boxing ring, letting Mary lead to her and then crossing with those bitter words that shut Mary up for another few minutes.

"Oh, you don't mean that," Mary smiled.

"I mean it good," Ma replied. Pa said to stop, but she held up one hand, the other still over her chest. "No, is all right. This is *my* house," she said. "Here I talk what I want. My boy is gone," she told the room. "He went to other people," she said.

"Ma!" I cried.

"Sure, Ma," she said. "Yes, Ma. What, Ma?" she demanded. "What kind of ma you have, tell me? A ma you don't care if she's alive or dead, maybe better I'm dead."

Holy smokes, I thought, she's going to start. Holy smokes, she wants a scene, a good one, and this poor girl has to take it from her. "Ma, don't," I said. "Can't we just sit around? Helen, Phil"—I turned to them—"how's for a little poker?"

"No poker here," she said. "Here is *Shabes* yet while I'm living. Poker play somewhere else with goyim." She cut the last word, for even she was conscious of whom she meant with it. Mary knew the word, all right, but there was no sign from her. She reached out for an apple and bit into it.

"These are wonderful," she said. "They take the place of coffee."

"Well." Ma had toned down. "I'm sorry, but here is no coffee with meat." It was a quiet reminder, a triumphant declaration of principle.

"I know about the dietary laws," Mary said eagerly, speaking only to Ma, trying desperately to please her with some word. "Joey told me all about them, and we've eaten at the kosher restaurant on Sixth Street," she said.

"I love the *kreplech*." She could not guttural the "ch" but bit down on it in American fashion.

"Who cares?" Ma said. "Even Helen, a Jewish girl, those things nobody care now." At least she had Helen into her net now.

"Enough," Pa said. "Who cares about laws? I eat ham in old country, I eat ham here. My wife don't like, she don't like, can't help."

"What did you care?" Ma asked. "You care for anything? You care from your kids, bring them here and forget they're Jews?"

Jesus, she was at it again. I suddenly became furious with her for sitting there so complacently acting her own brand of God.

"Shah," he said gently. "Shah, shah. You here with your family now," he said quietly. "Here is your family, boys both, wives both. Shah," he said. "Shah."

She became red with fury and rose suddenly, heading for the kitchen, but he stopped her under the arch, holding both her arms. "Ethel," he said. "Sit."

She didn't struggle. She looked at him, cursing him with her eyes. "Ethel," he said. "Sit, Ethel."

"Pa," I said. "Forget it. Forget it. We're going." I looked at Mary, sitting with her hands in her lap, frightened and hurt. "We're going now," I said.

He didn't release her arms, but Ma turned to me. "Who asked you to bring the shikseh in my house, goy, you?"

I got to my feet and took Mary's hand, raising her with me. Ma kept shouting, but I held Mary's hand, walking to the front closet with her and getting her coat. I could

hear Ma, but I didn't hear the words. I wouldn't hear the words, you see, just refused to listen with my mind. "Here, baby," I said. "Here, slip into your coat."

The old man walked over, and beyond him I could see Ma standing there, sneering at me, still red with anger. "Joe," he said. "Joe. You, Mary," he said, his head bent. "Joe," he said, "I see you, Joe. You, Mary, I see you both, no?"

I got my coat. I took one good look at Ma, at Phil, at Helen, who had moved to Pa's chair, at the old man, standing still before me, at Mary.

Maybe you've lost a family, too, when they were all still alive. I don't know. Maybe other people can spit on their childhood, on years gone, and turn and walk away and sleep that night, I don't know.

I wanted to fix it somehow, and would have begged Ma if it would have helped. I wanted to hold Mary and the old man, and my brother and my sister-in-law. I didn't want to let any of them go.

"Sure, Pa," I said.

He put his hand on Mary's coat. "Damn me," he said, "I figure different. I figure we be friends all. Damn me," he said. He put his other hand on my arm. "Joe," he said, "I figure different.

"Joe," he said, looking at us both and holding us both. "I sorry, Joe."

As I lay on the bed thinking of that dinner, it hit me that Mary should have left years back. It hit me that only a complete fool would have stayed with me as long as Mary had. It hit me that I had used her as hungry lumbermen level the forest of timber and as mineowners bleed a lode.

It hit me that if the paper were to send me out on such a story and I had listened to a man recounting these years, I would hold nothing except scorn for him. It hit me that if I were sitting in jury and had listened to such testimony as I myself have just offered, I would have held out till doomsday for a judgment against the man, with no recommendation for leniency, but for the severest penalty instead.

I had forsaken Jews and spurned Gentiles until now, this minute, lying here in the empty cabin, I was absolutely alone, as completely alone as though the world had disappeared about me.

What had I not done to this woman? What horrible schemes, what cowardly deeds had I not subjected her to? This was not self-pity. Don't think I was feeling sorry for myself. I would have, all right, if I could have gotten away with it, but pity was a little late and sorry was a little late. At thirty-one the time was gone for sorrow and the days past for pity, all right.

My mouth ached with the burn of cigarette smoke. I rose from the bed, walking carefully in the near-darkness that surrounded the room, and switched the light in the kitchen. There were still two more hours of sun, but here, hidden by the trees, the cabin lay swathed by the early dusk, wrapped by shadows and tied by stillness until it became a vacuum in which I was trapped.

I drank a glass of water, got a tray of ice cubes out of the refrigerator, and drank another glass of chilled water. I filled the tray carefully, shoving it back into the refrigerator, and wiped the glass and put it back in the cabinet.

My stomach was pinched from lack of food, and I looked in the refrigerator, rejecting the ham I saw and the eggs and the bacon. I took two tomatoes out, pulled open the bread board, and sliced them, making sandwiches with the graham bread I found. I ate standing up, my back to the sink, remembering that a century ago Mary and I had stood here arguing about the bazaar.

I gulped the bread, chewing furiously, shoving bread and tomato into my mouth until it was difficult to bite. I walked to the refrigerator, still chewing, using my forefinger to wipe escaping tomato juice. I poured a glass of milk, drank it standing up, poured another. I found a stale Danish pastry in the breadbox and ate that, dunking it into the milk so that it would soften up.

I washed the glass once more, the knife, wiped them carefully. I ran a dishrag over the breadboard and then, not satisfied with the result, used cleanser and water to rub the stain from it, running water over the board, using

cleanser again, and then draining it once more and drying it carefully.

I swept crumbs from the floor, using the dustpan, emptied it into the garbage pail under the sink. On an impulse I picked up the pail and carried it to the larger container in the yard.

I could feel my heart beginning to pound and remembered throwing the box into the lake, thinking of it as a trade, so that she should have appeared by now. I sat in the breakfast alcove once more, all the lights burning in the kitchen, for it was the safest, brightest room in the cabin.

I brought my fist down suddenly on the table, hard enough to set the back of my hand to tingling.

WHY HADN'T SHE COME BACK!

I felt sick to my stomach and, thinking to lose the sensation, lit a cigarette, but one drag made me really ill and suddenly I ran for the bathroom and there, bending over the toilet, lost what I had just eaten. I stood with head bowed for several minutes, my throat burning and my stomach violated by the sudden physical reaction, and then brushed my teeth furiously and my tongue and, using toothpaste on my forefinger, massaged my gums until they bled.

I should have learned to handle myself at this stage of the party, shouldn't I? One practices self-control, learns to know oneself, reasons with oneself.

She'd be home later. Of course she would. She'd come home when I was asleep, leave the car in the road, and maybe not even come into the bedroom. She wouldn't

talk to me tomorrow, but would drive into the city without a good-by, visit her mother, have lunch with one of her girl friends, call me, perhaps, to tell me she was sleeping at the Simpson home. I'd ask her to come back, but she'd be cool, and perhaps I'd have to wait a day, or she would call telling me to lock the cabin and come back to the apartment. I'd buy flowers and some candy and a bracelet of the sort she loved, but she wouldn't talk to me. I'd hold her and kiss her, but she would merely stand there, submitting to the affection, and then I would become mock angry and storm out of the apartment, or, if it were here, to the village, and go down the road and turn and sneak back and watch her through the windows and sit in the back yard until one o'clock or maybe two o'clock. I'd crawl into my bed and lay quiet and she'd pretend to be asleep, but pretty soon she'd say, "Joe," very weakly and meekly.

"Yes, baby?" I'd say, quietly too, and comforting and not at all righteous.

"Joey, I'm cold," she'd say. That's what she'd say, that she was cold.

"Shall I get you a cover out of the closet?" I'd ask, and I'd be smiling and waiting.

"Yes, but I'm real cold," she'd say, and I'd feel her fingers on my bed as she reached over. "Joey, I'm so *cold*."

"Maybe you've caught a chill," I'd say. "I ought to get you a glass of warm milk," I'd say.

"Don't want milk," she'd protest, looking for my fingers or my arm or my face, but I'd have moved far over to the side of my bed.

"Don't want covers," she'd say, pulling her hand back and beginning to whimper in the manner I loved.

I'd wait.

"Joe?" she'd say.

"Yes, darling." Gravely.

"Joe."

"What is it, baby?"

"Won't you come keep me warm?" she'd ask.

"Yes, darling." Still serious. "I'll come keep you warm."

And I'd get out of bed and slip into hers and she'd move at me in a rush, curled up, her hands trying to find my spine, and her legs cold and icy, rubbing mine, and she'd say "Brrrrrrrrrr," and I'd laugh and hold her.

WHY HADN'T SHE COME BACK?

I thought of calling the Club and, dropping the toothpaste onto the medicine-cabinet ledge, ran to the phone in the big room and told the operator to get me the number, but then I hung up.

I was cold now myself, shivering from a nameless chill. I found logs on the far side of the cabin and started a blaze in the fireplace. Standing there with my back to the fire, I thought that if I burned the cabin she'd come. She'd see the flames and the bazaar would be broken up, for everybody on the lake was a volunteer fireman, they forgot race ties when a fire began.

I'd bring her home fast enough and end this bazaar for good between us.

We'd take vacations up North with people I knew who at least kept their prejudices to themselves and if they told you once a month that you were a white Jew, all

right, maybe deep within me that's what I figured I was anyhow.

We'd be rid of this bazaar and these people and she'd have no reason to hound me with the need for my presence there, so that they could look at me and stare at me and be so perfectly polite to me because I was Mary's husband, the kike from town.

I wouldn't do that either, because the bazaar would follow me to town and up North, and if I moved to Africa, the bazaar would be there waiting for me in the veldt, the same tent under the trees, and maybe you got a free lion if you won the wheel games instead of somebody's pie.

I could call White Bear police and tell them my wife was lost, and I had to grimace at the thought.

I could call some of my detective friends in St. Paul, but what the hell was I to do, bust in there and drag her out?

There was nobody to call, not Bill Bird any more, since he'd learned of my wish that day in his basement, not the Simpsons, for they would refuse to listen, not Mary, for she had told me how she would come back. I could sit here and talk to myself.

Then I knew I was going to call Pa. I hadn't seen him for almost a year, since the last time he came to the office for a half hour to visit me. I hadn't talked with him since, not even on the phone. But he'd come. He'd listen, damn me, he'd know what to do.

Damn me, he'd say what to do. I gave the operator his number in St. Paul and waited, my heart still pounding,

hoping he'd be home, hoping he'd answer and not Ma, hoping he was all right, well and not ill, and suddenly sick myself with fear that he might be.

I heard the phone ringing and waited, afraid now that he might not be home, and then he said: "'Allo."

"Pa? Is that you, Pa?"

"Who talking? Joe? Is you talking, Joe?" Oh, bless him, oh, thank God for him.

"Pa, listen, what are you doing?"

"I eat. Why? What's the matter, Joe? What is with you, Joe? Trouble some kind of?"

"Yeah. Pa, yeah, I've got trouble. Pa, listen, will you drive out to the lake right away?"

"Is Mary? Go away," I heard him say. "Quiet for a minute, Ethel, what's the matter with you?"

"No, Pa, it's nothing like that. Only can you come right away?"

"Why not? Joe calls I'll come right away." I thought he sounded reluctant, but knew it was my eagerness to see him.

"Pa, you don't know how to get here. Pa, listen, go out through North St. Paul and hit for the lake, and then when you turn for Wildwood come straight down a mile until the road goes to the left. It's got to go to the left, and I'll be sitting on the fence there, and you'll see me. You know how, Pa?"

"I know. I drove by plenty," he admitted. "Don't sit on fences. I know where you live, kid, you don't know where I live, that's right. Not where you live."

"Pa, please. Be mad later, Pa. Just come now, will you. Alone, Pa?"

"Takes me half an hour, Joe." He hung up. I let the phone drop onto the cradle, and the first exhilaration of talking to him left me and I knew now, too, that he could not help, unless he went over and got her.

What the hell was I going to do?

My pa had all the guts in the world. You couldn't see his, they didn't show—not in the same manner, say, in which a cavalry officer carries his, walking with a chip on each shoulder always. Pa had more guts, I think, than any man I've ever known, because he was scared so much of the time. I think with him he had it figured that a coward, a complete moral and physical coward, had it worse than the man who takes his lumps.

He had the special kind that goes with humility. I swear the man could forgive more than any confession priest who ever lived. He had the deepest feeling for human frailty I ever saw.

There was a time in school when I was afraid to do my tumbling in gym class. Something held me back from twisting my body and I saw myself with broken bones

every night as I lay in bed. I had to do some fundamentals to get a passing grade in gym, and I told the old man about it one evening after supper.

Later, when I was reading in bed, he came into my room and sat on a chair. "Joe?" he asked.

"Yeah?"

"How's my Joe?" He pinched my arm. I set the book down and grabbed his arm, holding it against my body. I was so ashamed of telling him.

"I'm all right, Pa."

He got two apples out of his pocket, bit into one and tossed the other at me. He pushed his shoes off and swung his feet up on the bed. "You know, kit," he said, "in old country my father was rich sometime, poor sometime. More times poor," he laughed. "Poor or rich, was always four, six horses in the stable. We have big barn, two stories, upstairs filled with hay. Every morning boys working in the stable go upstairs and throw hay out of the door to the ground with a fence around it. They throw in a big pile, then they go back to the end of the barn, run, wave their arms, legs, and jump on top of the hay. Every morning, before they feed the horses. Was a lot of fun for them and my brothers, even my sisters used to get up in the summer to jump with them.

"Not me. Couldn't. Don't know why, maybe too high, maybe something else, but couldn't. Boys work in barn call me 'fraid and my brothers call me 'fraid and worse yet, my sisters too. My pa disgusted with me, didn't know what to think. Promise me pony if I jump, but not me. Some people don't like high up, Joe. Some people don't like turn somersets."

We munched our apples for a few minutes in silence.

"Know a man in old country was the strongest man in town," he said. "Could kill ten people with his hands alone. Every day in summer we swim in river. Him? Not even go in a boat. He was afraid, that's all right, no shame to be afraid. Me and you afraid of high place." He bent to pick up his shoes. "I think you better go to sleep, kit," he said. He reached for the light chain and, smiling at me, he said: "Tell you truth, Joe, if barn still here, I jump now. Not worth it to think you afraid."

I did the somersaults next day and my stint on the parallel bars, but never again.

I learned about his guts a few years later. One summer morning another fellow and I raided the garden of an old crone who lived below Colorado and down the slope, no more than fifteen feet from the railroad tracks. Her name was Beroubian and she was a funny old woman, the crazy woman, we called her, living in squalor on the few monthly dollars the railroad paid her for the death of her husband years before. Her daughter had left a son when she died, a big, hulking, dark-skinned fellow named Eli who did nothing but chase the girls at night, literally chase them, and put up storm windows and mow lawns during the day. He was tough and he had the biggest hands I ever saw. He liked to hang around Wabasha Street bars below the bridge, wait for the drunks, and show those who wanted to see how tough he was.

All this kid and I did was steal maybe a dozen radishes, but she told Eli, and that afternoon he chased us—but I could run, I'd learned that early.

From about two in the afternoon the block knew Eli was going to beat up the old man. He swaggered through the streets, stopping to ask people when the kike got home, and he told them to be on hand if they wanted to see one Jew get what was coming to him. Here was this guy about twenty-two and my pa pushing forty at the time, a man who never raised his hand in all his life except those years of the war.

I hid on the back porch, raising my eyes to screen level, and saw the small, excited hives of gossips standing in clusters on the block, spreading the news of Eli's boasting and waiting now for the slaughter to begin.

Pa didn't get home until about six, and Eli was home eating then, but he was told of the Jew's arrival soon enough. When we were eating I told Pa about the radishes and all, just how many we'd stolen. He finished supper and went into the front room. I tiptoed in and saw him sitting with the evening paper, but I knew he wasn't reading. When he saw me he rose, pushing his pants up with his elbows. "Come, Joe," he said.

"No, Pa, no."

"Yes, you come. Here in this country we don't live like rats. Hiding is no more for me, never."

"Pa, please." I ducked under the bed in my bedroom, but he just walked around to the foot of it, picked the whole mattress up, and looked at me on the dusty floor.

"Come. And now, Joe." I went with him. He didn't have a shirt on, just wore his undershirt, and his arms were white and thin below his brown neck.

He took my hand as we came down the back steps. I

saw the crowd on Colorado Street, waiting at the corner, and as they saw us they stepped back uncertainly, spreading out in a fan under the arc light at the intersection and leaving Eli in the middle before the half-moon of humanity waiting for the old man. He was wearing a blue shirt, his sleeves rolled far up on his arms, above the biceps, and the collar turned up, the points flapping in the early evening breeze. Pa walked right for him and then he let go of my hand and pushed me away behind him. My ma started screaming from the porch, but the old man didn't once turn his head.

"Put them up, you kike sonofabitch," Eli said.

"Eli," the old man said.

Eli rubbed his right fist in his left hand. He was breathing heavily through his nose, making himself furious, getting himself crazy mad.

Pa didn't move. "You think I fight with you, Eli," he said calmly, "you crazy. I'm forry years and you twenty and I'm going to fight?" He shook his head. "I don't fight. The kit pulled radishes, I'll pay. But scare me no," he said. "Scare me, damn me, not you and not hundred like you. In America nobody scares me." He bent suddenly, his hand reaching the dirt road, and Eli, startled, backed away. Then he came up and in his hand he held a rock the size of an apricot. "You want to fight," Pa said. "Come fight. You want to hurt man twenty years older. I got rock. You'll beat me sure. Bloody me, sure, maybe hurt me good for one day, two days. A week." He held the rock. "Maybe I hit you once with this, eh? Maybe you kick me, cripple me, sure, but not kill me, Eli." He took

two steps so that they were as close as a rhumba pair. "I'll kill you," he said, suddenly vehement. "You hear me, Mr. Gangster? I kill you! You hear me, Mr. Nazi, a man twenty years old hits man forry, I kill you. Now hit, you! Now hit! Now punch!" He waited, his hand closed over the rock.

Eli blustered and snorted, but he took the quarter Pa gave him for the radishes. Eli said he wouldn't fight a goddam foreigner, and then the old man, who had waited for him to say kike once more, turned on his heel and, holding out his hand for me, walked away from the mob. Ma was yelling for him to come up, but he sent me.

"Tell her I be there later," he said. To me: "Go. Go eat your radishes. Remember, I'm not here all your life. When you pull radishes, kit, *you* pay for radishes, not other peoples."

One day, years later, we were lying in the sun behind the house on Ashland Avenue and the talk got around somehow to guts and cowardice.

"Is all kind peoples, kit," he said, "and all peoples, honest and true, got his own crazy insides. You think you are the one, no, you are not the one alone. Is everybody. Me, maybe worse than most, and Ma and everybody. You know, kit, when I was in Army in Russia was my friend Petroff, you hear me talk from him. I think then Petroff is a coward, because every time is order to move up, he is hiding. Couldn't sleep in the dark, would lay in the hall all night where was a light. Well, one time we are on maneuvers, this is maybe 1911, I think, and sergeant is no good. Twenty hours a day is nothing to

him, and me and Petroff, only Jews, got the worst. Jew cannot be more than private, you understand, Joe. Only private unless he's doctor. We lose our kitchens on this maneuver and is no food. So six of us is lost and we see a farmhouse and we are starving. Plain starving." He moved his hand back and forth in the gesture umpires use to declare the runner safe.

"We go to the farmhouse and knock on the door, and farmer comes to door, nice-looking man, beard, clean, and we ask for food. So he spit on us, honest and true, Joe, if I'm lie. He spit and slam the door. I never forget this. I am going to leave and everybody too, but Petroff is white. This is the coward, Joe, and he is plain white. He takes out his bayonet, hooks him up with the rifle, and he knock off safety on the rifle. Then he say to me kick the door and move away.

"I say, 'Petroff, you going to give us court-martial.' He say, 'I give you slug now if you don't kick.' So I kick. Farmer comes to door and Petroff say, 'Farmer, we are starve. We must eat. Whatever you got, we eat. We sit at your table, farmer, and you serve us, farmer. I watch while you serve, farmer, and my camarades eat. Then, farmer, you serve me, nice, with Christmas linen and silver. When I finish eating, farmer, maybe I kill you and maybe I don't kill you, depends on if I'm too tired.'"

The old man rolled over, lying on his back, looking into the sun. "Joe, we eat pork, sweet like honey, and we eat beef. We eat turkey and wine and hot rolls, them kind with rum and black bread. Petroff finds cigars. Then Petroff sits down and eats slow, my God, I never see man

eat so slow, very careful, like this is examination for manners and wants to get A on report card. He eat an hour and then he took cigars and whole pig farmer had in shed, and we leave.

"You know why, Joe? Because farmer spit. If farmer don't spit, Petroff don't do that, but spit, that ends for Petroff. I'm not say he goes back and kills sergeant. He don't. He still don't like dark, and he still, when was the war, hide on the front, but nobody says he's coward. Not me, absolute not. Is everybody crazy a little, Joe."

Always, before Mary, I had come to him with my troubles, and never had he sent me away without the advice I needed.

He was such a *good* man. He could make a great show of yelling that he didn't care about anybody but his family, and yet how many old, illiterate, dirty Jews had he brought home so that I could fill out their naturalization papers? How many had he paid the fees for?

In the days before Mary had there ever been a lie between us? Never. Had there ever been a harsh word, an angry gesture? Never. He had provocation, cripes, what father hasn't, but he was possessed of such insight that nothing was really bad when I brought it to him and laid it open for him to see.

I left the big room and walked out on the porch to wait for him. How many times had he driven past here in the summer, shifting into second, maybe, and looking for a glimpse of Mary and me?

I saw now that I had wronged him, even more grievously than Mary, for never had there been cause, real or

imagined, with him. What had this man done that I should have forgotten him?

Peering through the screens toward the road, I was frightened suddenly of what he would say. Maybe he was coming now to get even. Maybe now he would tell me off for the fool I had been, and leave. Maybe now he had Ma in the car with him, and they could both gloat at how far down I had come and they would look at me, not leaving the car, and then the old man would shift gears, all love spent in that last instant, and drive off and leave me there with exhaust fumes in my face.

Maybe he wouldn't come at all. This last thought was the worst, and I fled from the porch, running out into the roadway, seeing the sun sitting just atop the trees, in the far left corner of the lake, the water gold and even. I looked up the road, but there were no cars, and then I started running toward the turn, frantic lest he would not come or had lost his way.

I was almost to the turn when I saw his sedan coming around the bend. I stood at the side of the road, all easy and calm suddenly, for Pa was here, and everything would be all right, he'd tell me what to do, and I had no shame at being so at thirty-one.

He slowed down as he had done when I was a kid, giving me a chance to jump on the running board, and then when he saw I was safe, my hands pressed against the inside of the door, he pressed down on the accelerator and drove to the cabin.

What you want I should do, Joe?" the old man asked. I'd told him the whole story from last night on. I'd told him more, made him listen to every gripe I had about our marriage. There was nothing but my hatred of being snubbed, but he listened, sitting in a chair on the porch with his sport coat wrapped around him.

I let my elbows rest on my knees and clasped my hands, looking at the floor.

"What you want I should do, Joe?" he asked again.

"I didn't ask you to do anything, for cripes' sake. I just wanted to tell you."

"You eat something today?" he asked.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"You eat something today?"

"Yes. Yes, for cripes' sake, I ate," I said.

"Go in the car." He pointed to the sedan. "In the back seat there, Joe, is a bag, bring here."

There was a khaki bag sitting on the back seat over a spread newspaper. The bottom was wet when I picked it up, and I held it gingerly, carrying it back to the porch. The old man had pulled a small end table over between the two chairs. "Put here," he ordered. "Here, Joe." I set it down and he took out corned-beef sandwiches made with

fresh pumpernickel and green tomatoes and green pickles and two bottles of pop.

He picked up a sandwich, unwrapping it, and offered me half. "I'm not hungry," I said.

He set the half down on the waxed paper and bit into his portion. He picked up one of the small green tomatoes, wiped the dill from it, and as he bit into it my salivary glands went to work on me. I picked up the half sandwich and found another tomato.

We ate silently, neither of us talking. He'd found some real corned beef, all right, I'd never had any as good, as tender, as spicy. I went into the kitchen for a bottle opener and got the caps off both of them.

When we had finished the old man lit a cigar and sat back in his chair, while I cleaned up the mess, pushing paper and tomato rinds and the bottles into the bag.

I lit a cigarette, tilting my chair until it rested against the screen, its back to the lake. He watched me smoke and then he said: "Good corned beef, Joe?"

"Christ, it was good!"

"Christ never eat like that, Joe," he said.

"Yeah."

He crossed his legs. "I bring corned beef for special," he said.

"Special what?" I asked him.

"Special for you. Kit, you call me, I'm here. You didn't ask how's Ma, how's Phil, Helen. They have a baby three months already, you didn't ask, maybe you don't know. You know you in trouble, call the old man, he'll come."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry is cheap, Joe," he said.

"All right."

"All right," he agreed. "No Ma, no Pa, no Phil, own brother. But corned beef you eat, huh, Joe?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I tell you what I'm talking about, damn fool, you." He held the cigar pointed at me. "You see a goy should like corned beef like we? No, you never see. Here are you, hell with family, hell with Jews, but corned beef you still could eat day or night."

"*What* are you *talking* about?"

"You a Jew, kit."

"I know that, for cripes' sake."

"No, you don't know."

"The hell I don't," I shouted.

He moved his hand up and down. "Quiet, here are goyim, don't like kike noises. You don't know," he repeated. "If you know, then you never marry with that womans."

"Stop it."

He looked at me for an instant and then rose. "Where you going?" I asked, getting to my feet and putting my hand on his arm. "Where are you going?"

"I'm too old you should talk to me like that," he said.

"Pa, listen. Pa, for Pete's sake." I held his arm. "Pa, please, don't be mad." I pushed him back into the chair.

"You think I don't like Mary?" he asked. "I like her, honest and true. If she Jewish, she be the best for you. Best you could find. She be best for you maybe now, but you can't let her."

"Why?"

He smiled. "I ask *you* why, Joe. I marry *Jewish* womans."

"For Christ's sake, what's that got to do with me?"

He grimaced. "Please, one favor, Joe. Leave Christ home. I heard enough from that fella all my life."

"All right."

"Joe, what you want I should do?" he asked again.

"I don't know, Pa." I was all tired. "I don't know," I said. "I just don't know what to do now."

He shook his head. "I don't know either."

I didn't let him talk. "I figured that if I told you what had happened, then you'd figure out something. I figured you'd know what I should do, that once I told you, then you'd know. I guess I didn't know what to do. I guess I was a little wild. I guess I'm going crazy. I guess I am plain going crazy." I wrung my hands. I'd started to shake a little. "I guess this is the end of me, all right."

He let the cigar touch the hair on the back of my hand.

"Shah," he said as I cried out from the burn. "Shah," he said. "That way talks crazy people. You not crazy."

"I'm going to leave town," I said. "I'll leave tonight."

"Too late for leave town, Joe," he said.

"No, it isn't. Oh no, it isn't. I'm going."

"Good-by," he said, crossing his legs once more.

I didn't move.

"Joe, you hear me," he said. "You still think you should ask old man like you baby, like you kit ten years old?"

I was still.

"What you think, Joe?" he asked. "What you think?"

"I won't go there," I said, the words sounding like a long-drawn-out hiss.

"Don't go," he said.

"Why the hell should I go there?" I asked.

He was silent.

"Why should I go there when they don't want me?" I asked. "So they can be polite because I'm Mary's husband? So they can feel sorry for Mary, and maybe if they like me, if they figure I'm maybe just as good as them, then they'll say I'm the white Jew? Do I need that?"

"I don't know, kit," he said. "Honest and true, I don't know."

"You know what I'm going to do?" I asked. "I'm going to lock this place up and go home with you. I've got my fill of it and of this kind of a life. I'm going to come home and to hell with it. Let her have the cabin and the apartment and let her get a divorce, I don't care. I'm going home."

"Not to me," he said.

"Huh?" I looked at him incredulously.

"You don't come to me," he said, "not even if you mean what you say. You come home, then what? Then call and sneak and go back and starts again that tragedies. No, kit, no more for me."

"I'll go to the Y. I'll move into a hotel on Jackson Street."

"Why not?" he asked. He was maddeningly calm, sitting there before me.

"I'll guarantee you she'll come when she finds out I'm not here," I said. "She'll come then, all right."

"Why not?" he asked.

"What's the matter with you?" I shouted. "What did you come out here for, to needle me?"

"I come out 'cause you call me come out."

"Well, what should I do?" I looked at him, rolling the cigar around in his mouth. "What should I do?"

"What should I say?"

"You can tell me something, can't you?"

"Tell you what, kit? Now, here, tonight, what shall I tell you? What you think, Joe, I gonna get sick all over for you now? No, I don't get sick no more and I don't let Ma get sick no more. Enough," he said. "Plenty enough from you, kit. Can't help you now. Can't help you anybody now. What you expect when you marry with her? You think she gonna light candles every Friday night for you? You think maybe she gonna be Jewish, damn fool, you? You think she gonna be like Helen, like Ma, go to Hadassah, maybe?"

"No."

"What then, tell me? I interested to know."

"I didn't think she'd start with those friends of hers again," I said. "I figured I was enough for her."

He smiled wryly, shaking his head. "You a pautz too, Joe."

"Why?"

"What you expect, she's going to change for you?"

"How do you mean?"

"You expect she's going to be Jewish, maybe, give up

friends, forget Christmas, Easter, church? You expect she wants to live like Jews live? You think she wants kids should go to Hebrew school, get bar mitzvahed. What kind damn fool you are?" he asked, smiling at me. "How many kinds damn fool are you, Joe?" he asked.

"I suppose so," I said dully.

"Joe, this America here, you know that. Yes?" He nodded. "Not Russia here, not Germany. America. You not American, Joe, you Jew. In Russia if Jew marries Russian—plenty doing it—then Jew becomes Russian, not going to church. Church is nothing. If Jew marries German in Germany, then Jew becomes German. Till Hitler comes, now he just dead. Same in Italy, same here. Got nothing with church. Goy, he lives different, Joe, thinks different, sleeps good nights. Jew not like that."

"Don't think I don't know it," I said.

"Then what for you call me, kit?"

"I don't know. I figured you'd help me."

"Can't help you, kit."

"No."

"Can't help you. Not me, not nobody. Not even you."

"Pa?" I asked. "Pa, what can I do?"

"Joe," he said, gently now. "I don't know what you do, I honest and true don't know. What you want from me, kit? What for you bring me here? Look good on me, kit. Good. Look good. I old man now, you know, Joe. Real old. Real tired. Not head tired. Feet tired and hands tired and heart tired. I got no more room for trouble in me, Joe, garage filled up. All my life is trouble. Trouble in Russia, trouble in army. Trouble coming to

America. Then when is shortage in trouble, comes Joe for four years, he's specialist in trouble."

He raised his hand to quiet me. "No, kit, no. I not mad no more. I not argument with you now. I tell you only one thing: I want no more. Never. Maybe I got five years, maybe ten, maybe left a week to me with Ma. Leave me alone, Joe. Yes? Leave alone."

I guess it wasn't until that minute, right here on the porch, that I knew how old he really was and how much grief I'd really given him. "I'm sorry I called you," I said. "I'm really sorry, Pa."

He was standing, looking out over the lake. "No charge," he said. "No sorry. No big thing I drive here." "Pa?"

"Yes, kit." He stood above me, his hand on my shoulder. He rumbled my hair. "Yes, Joe. What, Joe?"

"Pa?" I didn't want him to leave.

"Go, Joe," he said very softly. I could just hear him. "Go, Joe, try her way, maybe fits better her ideas. Maybe she's right. Go, Joe, to her."

I felt almost a traitor getting him to say it.

"Pa."

"Nu, kind?"

"You have to go now, huh?"

"Make better if I stay?" His hand cupped my neck.

"I don't know."

He was silent. I got up and walked to the door with him. "Say hello to Mary, Joe," he said.

"Say hello to Ma."

He turned to me, pushing the door open with one hand.

Then he nodded twice, his lips barely smiling. "'Allo, Joe," he said.

I couldn't stop the tears now. I didn't raise my hand to my cheek. I let them trickle down my face, run along the cheekbone, and drop to my collar. "Pa," I said. "Pa," I said. "Pa."

"Come sometime to see us," he said. "Bring Mary sometime to see us," he said.

"Pa."

"Take care yourself, kit."

The tears came without end after he left. I could not stop crying. I lay on the sofa in the big room, my head hanging over the side, and cried until I was weak. I cried until my eyes ached and the taste of the tears in my mouth was unbearable. I cried for Pa and for Ma and for Mary, and most I cried for Joe.

I lit a cigarette and lay on my back smoking, the trembling gone now with the tears and my legs weak from the escaping tension.

I'd had some day, all right. Some day and some evening and some seven years I'd had, all right.

I'd picked a good life for myself, all right. I'd found a good life. A real, full, rich life I'd found.

Have you had enough, Mary? I asked. Have you proved your point, Mary? I said aloud. Do you want to see me like this, Mary? Come on home and see me, Mary. Come on, I said aloud, my voice no stronger than if she were sitting beside me, rubbing my head. Come on, Mary, and watch me here, with my face swollen and my eyes red-rimmed. Come on, Mary, and see me.

What's the matter with you, Mary? I asked. What do you want? What good is it to you to have me like this, does it make you feel better, does it please you? Aren't you happy, do you have to have excitement at this stage of the party?

Damn you, what do you want?

I jumped off the sofa and almost ran to the telephone. Enough groveling here, damn it. I'd had enough cowering here, waiting for her to be good enough to come home.

I told the operator to get me the Yacht Club, and while I waited I hooked a chair with my toe and pulled it toward me so I could sit down. I told the girl who answered to get Mary, and when she asked who was calling, in that sweet means-nothing voice, I was just as sweet telling her I was Mary's husband.

Mary didn't come to the phone. She sent word that she was expecting me when I got ready.

I almost broke the cradle when I slammed the phone down. Expecting me, eh? She could expect me all right. To hell with her. I couldn't go back to Pa's, all right. I couldn't leave town, all right, but I'd damn well give her as rough a time as she was giving me. I was no loser

here, remember that. I had a job and nothing more, and I'd done my job when I was a hell of a lot worse off than now. I'd fix her, all right.

She was expecting me! Well, damn her, let her expect me. Let her sit there all night expecting me. Tonight and tomorrow and the next day. When she got ready to come home, let her come home, and if I wasn't here, I'd be at the apartment. I had a little equity in this partnership too. This wasn't a one-party ticket, both of us were on.

I walked to the back door and locked it. I turned off the lights, went through the cabin closing windows if maybe it rained. I pulled the blinds snug on the porch and came back into the big room. I scattered the fire and killed it and then went back to my chair by the phone.

I called Morris Portugal in St. Paul. He wanted me to go to the night ball game with him and Betty, but I was in no mood for it.

I called Max Fisher, the furniture buyer, but he was stuck at the store, taking inventory. He wanted me to drive in around midnight and we'd have a few drinks. To hell with that.

I called Bob Bernstein. His mother told me he'd gone to Chicago and seemed surprised that I didn't know. I should have known, all right, he was probably up North in a cabin with Marge. My God, the poor fellow was still lying about his activities.

I couldn't call Bill Bird. I'd alienated him and antagonized Kay. I sat by the phone, my hand down on the cradle, and then, finding the guts, told the operator to get him, giving her his home phone.

"Bill?" I said.

"Hello, Joe."

"I was just wondering, Bill. Mary's at some club meeting. Maybe we could have a few drinks, or a movie or something."

"I'm sorry, kid," he said. "I promised Kay I'd take her to the Pop Concert tonight."

"Well, gee." I was being gay now. "Put my darlin' on. She can't go anyplace without Joe. Put her on, Bill."

"She's under the shower, Joe," he said. "Besides, we're going with a party."

"Yeah."

"Having a good vacation?"

"Wonderful, Bill. Really wonderful."

"That's swell."

"Yeah," I said. "Really wonderful."

"Joe?"

"Yeah, Bill?"

"Were you going to bring Mary into town with you?"

"She's at this club meeting, Bill," I repeated.

"Yeah, Joe," he said, "she brought me the publicity for the bazaar. Last Thursday. We ran a picture this week."

"Oh," I said. "Yeah, that's right."

"Joe," he said. "What's the matter, kid? What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Really nothing's wrong, Bill. Well, have a good time. My love to Kay, Bill."

"Joe."

"Really, Bill, nothing. I'm going to catch a movie out here. You better get dressed, Papa. Night."

When I'd hung up there was nobody left to call. I was

a mile from the village. I tested the back door, went through the front, locked it, and started up the road.

I walked up the center of the gravel road, my hands in my pockets, my head down, feeling the early evening breeze off the lake, kicking at the pebbles. I got to the turn, bent for a handful of gravel, and sat down on the rail.

I knew then I was going to the bazaar.

Maybe I'd known it all day; maybe I'd stalled as late as I could. I don't know. I'm not telling you that I got a vision, that I saw a clean, bright flame burning and the right road, hell with that crap. I didn't see anything. I just wasn't going to lose that girl.

I love her. I don't even know how to tell you that. I've only been in love once and for keeps all the way. I don't know how to tell you just what she was, I'm not a specialist, as the old man said.

I know one thing: That woman is into me so deep that I've lost my identity; there isn't any me, you understand, there is me with her or a hopeless, uncertain, useless hulk.

I had to go there because I was a goner otherwise. I had to go to the bazaar because if I didn't, she'd go back to her folks. I'd pushed her almost too far once, and this was the second time. Twice in seven years. All right, I'd see her friends and let them talk and be patronizing and swear they loved me. I could listen to that crap, I'd been listening to it for most of my life.

I remembered walking home from Hebrew school, a gang laying for me always on the State Street bridge, and

still I trotted toward the cabin. I remembered the skating rink and that sonofabitch trying to get me to kneel to him. I remembered that poor bastard at the medical school, and the Bund meetings I'd covered in Minneapolis, and the kids jeering the miserable old ragpickers.

I remembered the old man's stories about Russia, every one, and I thought of him, home now, and lying on the couch and thinking of the son he'd lost, and I trotted toward the cabin.

I remembered that guy at Turtle Lake and the hotel in Duluth, that sniveling Swede desk clerk spotting me right off and saying they were full.

I thought of signs scrawled on synagogue walls, manure dumped on rabbi's porches, crowds at prize fights in which a Jew appeared in the ring, screaming to kill the kike.

I thought of the thousand epithets I'd heard in a thousand bars, for no reason but that the goy was temporarily out of whipping posts.

I thought of restricted neighborhoods, really restricted, and advertisements in my own damn paper for Christians only; of the Gopher Club, which Simpson had felt forced to say wasn't his doing when I'd been foolish enough to let myself be put up, and still I ran up the path and unlocked the door and shed clothes as I moved through the house before the elevator in my stomach lost altitude and started dropping. I was full of the momentary toughness like the feeling you get the first time you climb the steps to the high board, before you reach the platform and look down.

I took another shower, soaping myself very carefully and rubbing oil into my hair while it was wet, so it wouldn't look glossy after it was combed. I brushed my teeth again and used the razor very lightly on my face.

There was a pair of stockings under the trousers and a shined pair of moccasins on the floor, and I knew suddenly she must have shined them last night.

She'd slipped a wide leather belt into the dungarees, and after I'd pulled the basque shirt over my head I tightened the belt as far as it would go, keeping my stomach in.

I took one good slug of bourbon out of the bottle in the big room and then a short one.

I wanted to call Pa and tell him something, I didn't know what, tell him I wanted to come to supper Friday or tomorrow or to breakfast. I wanted to comfort him, please him and sit with him, let Mary sit with him and talk with him, listen to his stories, and for an instant I wanted to be a kid lying in bed Friday nights with all the library books, the clean sheets under me, the comforter from Russia keeping me warm, three apples beside me and the reading lamp the old man had walked downtown to buy, the shades halfway down, snow falling outside and my feet warm, waiting for the old man to come in and kiss me good night and sit on the bed, pick up a book, and ask me what I was reading.

I wanted to wake on summer Saturdays with the gang outside waiting for me and gulp my cocoa, grab my first-baseman's mitt, and run to join them.

I wanted to sit in the kitchen, my feet in the cooking

chamber of the old wood burner, and the old man with his shoes off sitting beside me telling me 'stories.

I wanted to come home from school with a report card full of A's as I'd done and have Ma kiss me.

I wanted to meet Mary for the first time all over again and take her to the festival, but do it right and bring her home and my ma kiss her and the old man put his arm around her and tell her she was too good for me.

I wanted to go for the first ride with Mary and feel me all good and clean and young inside, alive to the night and ready for anything the next day's sun sought out. I wanted to swim with Mary for the first time, and make up with Phil, and the four of us, he and Helen and Mary and me, eating together and drinking together.

I wanted to get married all over again, in the rabbi's study, with Ma there and Pa and Phil best man and the Simpsons and Mary's friends and my friends and our bags packed in the car and everybody happy and wishing us well.

I wanted a honeymoon starting in the Gopher Hotel, the penthouse reserved and waiting for us and nobody in the world knowing where we're going, and never having been to bed with Mary, but carrying her through the door and holding her, talking soft to her and chasing her fears.

I wanted to correct every bad day, every bad thought, every wrong thing I'd ever done. I was filled with joy suddenly and called the Gopher Hotel, told the desk clerk to hold the penthouse for me. She'd go. She'd love

it. She was always ready for adventure, and an unexpected movie was high adventure to her.

I stood on the porch looking at the lake. The water was almost blood red. I walked to the boat, remembering suddenly that I'd thrown the box into the lake, but then I thought of the all-night drugstore on Ninth and St. Peter three blocks from the hotel. I could tell her I needed cigarettes.

The boat was dry. I spread my handkerchief on the seat, pulled the line off the post, and got my hands on the oars. There was a red streak of sunlight all the way across the lake from the dock to the club.

I knew one thing: I'd have to row across. The waters weren't going to open for me.

I pushed an oar against the dock and swung free. All right, you bastards, here I come.

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